THE Nation.

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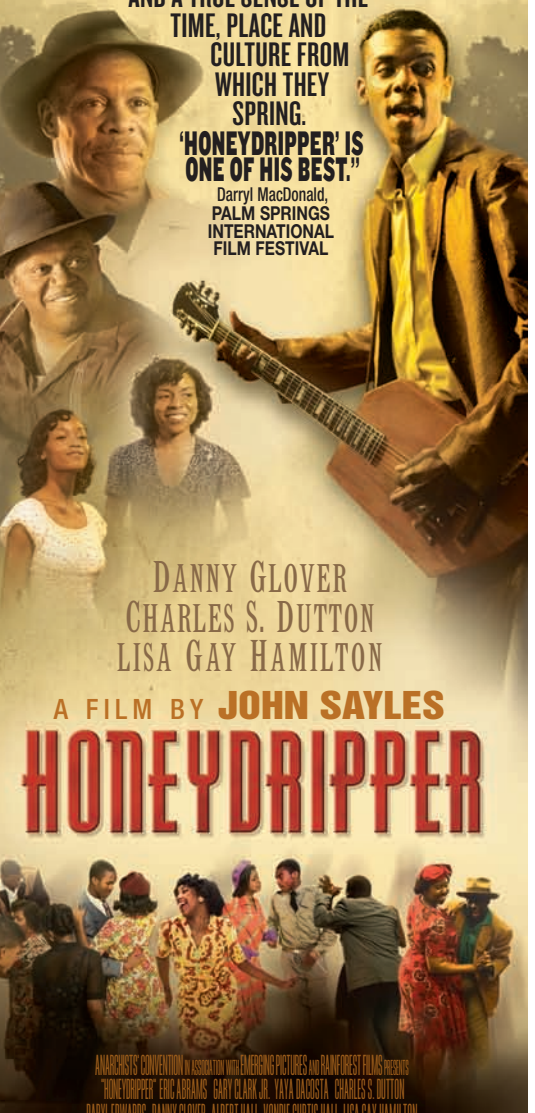

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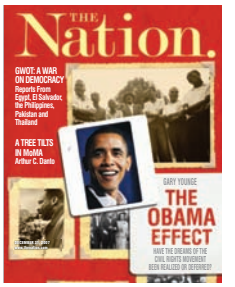
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GARY YOUNGE
THE OBAMA EFFECT

Obama: Great Black/White Hope

Chicago

Gary Younge's "The Obama Effect" [Dec. 31] offers insight into the senator's cross-racial appeal and that of others of the constructed "new generation of black leadership." As Younge states, "race is…a performance," and Barack Obama and his cohorts have mastered the act to become viable candidates—that is, to appeal to whites. Their race must be presented not as a source of contention but as a symbol of hope. Obama reminded us of this in his victory speech in Iowa, when he reiterated this feel-good theme: his biography, beginning with a black Kenyan father and a white American mother, is possible only in America.

As the locus of black politics continues to shift from the church and the community to the boardroom and the academy, new presentations of race will be the norm for African-American candidates. Why would we expect them to act in the same way as the civil rights–era black politicians when circumstances have changed?

Yet I do not think we are in a postracial society, as the elated mainstream pundits claimed in the wake of Obama's success in Iowa. Rather than signaling the end of racial politics, Obama's spin on race shows the savvy of the post–civil rights black candidates in marginalizing race.

Susan Smith Richardson

Folly Beach, S.C.

Barack Obama may not have been raised in the black community and the black church, but he is shaped by them because of his adult choices. Organizing in Chicago is tough and gritty, and closer to the essential urban black experience than that of most of the black politicians Gary Younge mentions. The cadences of the black church Obama attends are in his speeches. And as he says, being passed up by New York taxis taught him quickly what it means to be black.

Perhaps the difference between the older generation of black leaders and the new is something else: that they are about more than the black experience and the needs of urban and rural black communities. These "new" politicians make the connection between black communities and other communities of need.

It is striking here in South Carolina to see how many moderate Republicans are investigating Obama. They are drawn to his vision of a different kind of politics. It's the Democratic chattering classes that don't seem to get past his skin. Those who see him "only" as black also believe he doesn't have enough experience because they dismiss everything but his Senate career. It's still a perilous journey for a politician who acknowledges his racial heritage.

Susan Breslin

Israeli Cart Before Palestinian Horse

Shaker Heights, Ohio

Henry Siegman has a way of co-opting conclusions by using them as major premises in his syllogisms. A good example is his "Post-Annapolis Pitfalls" [Dec. 31]: "no Palestinian leader could end violent resistance to the occupation in the face of Israel's refusal to reveal how much Palestinian territory it intended to retain." This cart is standing in front of a horse called "negotiation." The comment reads as if the entire initiative for peace lies only in Israeli hands. If Israel would but indicate (it has on many occasions) what it would like to retain in exchange for territory going to Palestine, then all would be solved. Thus Palestinian violence has nothing to do with rights of return, recognition of Israel as a Jewish state or the cessation of violence coming from Hamas and others who prefer firing their guns in the air when they are not launching rockets at Sderot.

Harold Ticktin

Siegman Replies

Washington, D.C.

Harold Ticktin is quite right. One must not put the cart before the horse. For this sage advice to be useful, however, one must be able to recognize which is

letters@thenation.com

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Twin Disasters

As the election drama renewed optimism among voters disgusted with the Bush era, there was an unfortunate side effect: the war in Iraq seemed to disappear from the headlines. Perhaps it was public exhaustion over a war that is nearing the end of its fifth year, or the unwillingness of Democratic leaders and candidates to keep pressing their call for an end to the occupation. Perhaps it was the White House's orchestrated "Petraeus moment" in September and the temporary decline in violence in Iraq that led politicians and media to put the war on the back burner. Meanwhile, Democrats were slow to confront another conflagration—the tottering economy. We now face the prospect of an election-year recession on top of a disastrous and costly war.

EDITORIAL

Some voters feel that one or the other crisis demands the higher priority: the war or the rapidly deteriorating economy. We believe both are top priorities. These twin disasters are linked in practical necessity and as a stark expression of America's weakened condition. One reason Washington is so ill equipped to deal aggressively with recession is that it has spent so lavishly on a war that should never have been fought in the first place. How does government turn around a shrinking economy when it already blew its wad on Iraq? Indeed, the linkage poses discomforting questions for Democrats as well as Republicans.

Two years ago Nobel Prize–winning economist Joseph Stiglitz estimated that the war may ultimately consume $2 trillion—now much closer to standard projections than the $200 billion estimate the Bush crowd originally scoffed at. Last year the Democratic Congress took up the fight to end the war, but most Democrats, fearing the accusation that they would be "abandoning the troops," shied away from using their power to curb or cut off war spending. This is a shame, since the war continues to drain desperately needed resources. The projected cost of the war for fiscal year 2008 is $156 billion, which, according to the National Priorities Project, is enough to provide healthcare for 44 million Americans (only slightly less than the total number without healthcare); or to build 1.2 million new housing units; or to provide 161 million homes with renewable energy.

If this war drifts out of sharp focus, there will be dire consequences for the next President. The Defense Secretary and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff are beating the drum for fat military budgets, even as Iraq's defense minister announced that he expects US troops to play guardian and instructor for Iraqi forces through 2018. Although all the Democratic candidates now reject long-term occupation and have called for withdrawal, among the leading contenders, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are unwilling to suggest even modest cuts to our out-of-control military budget. In fact, both call for increasing the size of the military by some 90,000 troops, which would actually increase the budget. John Edwards opposes a troop increase and has called for cutting "wasteful" spending on such programs as missile defense, but he has not called for overall reductions in the military budget.

The economic crisis has so far been approached hesitantly and without the boldness it demands. The stimulus proposals offered by leading Democrats hover around $100 billion. This is too little. Some authorities in academia and on Wall Street warn that it will take $300 billion to $400 billion in emergency spending to alleviate severe suffering and generate real recovery. Losses from Wall Street's folly are likely to total $900 billion, warns the Levy Economics Insti-

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NEWS & ANALYSIS

Citizen Kang: Political fiction by Gary Phillips

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Allan Nairn: Suharto, Passing

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Will John Edwards Prevail?

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WEB LETTERS

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tute, a respected think tank. That's an Iraq-class disaster.

This is one of those rare moments when a political party's character is tested. This time the gut check is on two fronts. The "progress" from the surge in Iraq is a manufactured illusion. Our military and diplomatic leaders are conceding failure to achieve the reforms the surge was supposed to make possible. When even top US officials argue for "Iraqi solutions to Iraqi problems," we know the illusions in high places are dying. Democrats—especially the presidential candidates—should continue to lay out their case against the surge's "success" and argue this to the voters. (Some Bush Administration officials and their necon cheering section have applauded the new Iraqi de-Baathification law as a crucial step forward and a vindication of the surge strategy. But both Shiites and Sunnis familiar with the law say it could be even more restrictive than the old one, and thus stoke further sectarian tensions.)

Washington can help most by not only ending the occupation of Iraq but by accelerating diplomatic negotiations and involving all regional players in working toward a solution there, as well as by increasing aid to the millions of war refugees.

As the economy deteriorates, Democrats have a golden opportunity, since the Republicans—still obsessed with making permanent their tax cuts for the wealthy—are not offering anything close to what's needed. Leading Congressional Democrats as well as the presidential contenders must demonstrate convincingly how government can be a powerful instrument for the common good. If the twin disasters deepen, they will not be insulated from blame by making halfhearted deals with George W. Bush.

Reconstruction Lessons

COMMENT

The controversy inspired by Hillary Clinton's remark crediting Lyndon Johnson with the civil rights movement's successes seems to have subsided. Contrary to much recent punditry, this contretemps does not prove that the Democratic primary has been reduced to a zero-sum game of identity politics. Rather, it reveals the complexity of bringing together the aspirations of different social groups within a single political movement—something Americans have experienced before.

Some commentators have already compared Barack Obama to Frederick Douglass, the former slave and crusader for emancipation who insisted that the post–Civil War years constituted the "Negro's hour" and that the struggle for the rights of the newly freed slaves took precedence over gaining the vote for women. In this scenario, Hillary Clinton is a latter-day Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who broke with her male allies when they called on women to subordinate their claims. But like many historical analogies, this one distorts as much as it reveals.

American feminism was born of the abolitionist movement, with its powerful insistence on universal equality. Before the Civil War, abolitionists and feminists, male and female, worked together for an end to slavery and a new definition of citizenship in which rights would not be limited by race or gender.

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Noted.

MARGINS OF ERROR: OK, the pollsters all got New Hampshire wrong. The reporters—claiming they were punctilious stenographers, accurately reporting what the pollsters said—got it wrong. The pundits, extrapolating, based on the polls, got it wrong. The candidates' staffs—both of them—got it wrong. And the next day, what happened? Well, there was, of course, a tsunami of speculation on why the pollsters got it wrong. Was it **Hillary Clinton**'s incipient tear? Or the independents who, assuming **Barack Obama** had it in the bag, went for **John McCain**? Was it older women? Or was it New Hampshire's contrarian electoral DNA? Or was it all of the above? Whatever.

But simultaneously the press started citing new polls! By week's end, **Tim Russert** was asking Clinton on *Meet the Press* what she thought about polls showing that most Democrats thought Obama was more electable than she. The following Monday, the subhead on the **New York Times**'s lead story was "Poll Finds Economic Worries Now Top Issue." Never has a reputation so universally besmirched been so quickly rehabilitated. Had the pollsters improved their methodology? Had they recalibrated (or at least restated) their "margin of error" (their original New Hampshire projections, off by 8 percent or more, were said to have a margin of error of 3 percent)? Or was somebody (everybody?) not paying attention? Beats me. Maybe we can take a poll and find out. VICTOR NAVASKY

THE WHISTLEBLOWER: We mourn the passing of **Philip Agee**, the courageous former CIA officer who, in his 1975 book *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*, exposed the agency's subversion of democracy and its practices of torture and murder, naming hundreds of officers, agents and companies involved with the crimes. Agee was motivated, he said, by the CIA's support for "the worst imaginable horrors" in Latin America.

Agee paid a high price for his courage. He became a permanent target of the US government, and his passport was revoked. Driven out of Britain, where his book was first published, he was denied a safe haven in many other Western European countries. He was issued a passport by the revolutionary government of Grenada; when that government was overthrown, the Nicaraguans stepped forward. After the Sandinistas lost power, he was granted a passport by Germany, where he lived with his wife, **Giselle Roberge Agee**, a ballerina.

Agee co-edited (with **Louis Wolf**) a book further exposing undercover plots and agents—*Dirty Work: The CIA in Western Europe*. He collaborated closely with **Covert Action Information Bulletin**, a magazine devoted to stopping criminal CIA activities. That work ended publicly, at least in the United States, with the passage in 1982 of the Intelligence Identities Protection Act—aimed, as one Congressman said, at "the Philip Agees of the world." Perhaps the best way to remember Agee is to support others who find the courage to expose criminal misconduct by their own governments. MICHAEL RATNER

NURSES, UNITED: The **California Nurses Association** (CNA) is one of those rare unions that really make you believe in the future of organized labor. Its members conducted an extraordinary campaign in 1999 to pass a state ballot measure capping patient-to-nurse ratios. When **Arnold Schwarzenegger** tried to block its implementation, the union launched an all-out assault, hounding him into retreat. While some unions have welcomed a role for private insurers in healthcare reform, CNA has focused relentlessly on single-payer, launching **CheneyCare**, a campaign arguing that every American deserves the kind of publicly funded health coverage that saved the veep's life. In 2004 the union went national, which inevitably meant going head-to-head with SEIU, home to **Andy Stern**, whose own healthcare reform strategy has brought him into an alliance with Wal-Mart execs. After being independent for 100 years, CNA moved last May to affiliate with the AFL-CIO, an indication that the union was ready to play hardball.

This combination of radicalism and realpolitik won the union a big prize January 10, when a young, 5,100-member Pennsylvania nurses union (**PASNAP**) voted to join CNA. PASNAP president **Patricia Eakin**, a working RN, said CNA carried the day with its "push for higher nurse-to-patient ratios," its "assertive, aggressive approach to organizing nurses" and its affiliation with the AFL-CIO, "because they support Medicare for all." The Pennsylvania victory came just after CNA, now 80,000 strong, unionized hundreds of nurses in Whittier, California, and Reno, Nevada. CNA president **Zenei Cortez**, also a working nurse, said her union is now organizing in Ohio, Kentucky and Texas (where it will be in direct competition with SEIU). When asked whether SEIU had competed for the Pennsylvania nurses, she said, "There might have been some rumblings, but those nurses really wanted us. You can't even compare us with SEIU. We're the nurses at the bedside, not administrators, and we run our organization. We want to be the national voice for RNs, and we want to get everybody on the same page with universal, single-payer healthcare." ESTHER KAPLAN

BUSH'S PILGRIMAGE: Tears welled up in **George W. Bush**'s eyes as he visited holy sites in Israel in January. But the President did more than walk in the footsteps of Jesus. While he spouted the rhetoric of peace on his tour of the Middle East, the Pentagon announced a new weapons sale to Saudi Arabia—part of the Administration's push to contain and intimidate Iran. In the first phase of an arms package that could reach $20 billion, Bush finalized a deal to provide the Saudis with $123 million worth of **Boeing Joint Direct Attack Munitions**. Meanwhile, Israel's concerns about the sale have been assuaged by Washington's commitment to provide Jerusalem with $30 billion in military aid over the next ten years.

On the fifth day of his trip—while visiting Abu Dhabi, another major US arms client—Bush intoned that "America is using its influence to foster peace and reconciliation." A few days later, battles between Israeli security forces and Hamas members killed eighteen Palestinians and a kibbutz worker, marring hopes for the newly started peace talks and serving as a reminder that the United States cannot pave the path to peace by selling weapons. FRIDA BERRIGAN

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During the war feminists put aside the campaign for women's rights to join in the struggle to save the Union and free the slaves. But they saw Reconstruction as a golden opportunity to claim for women their own emancipation.

In the war's aftermath, Congress rewrote the Constitution to guarantee equality before the law for blacks and the right to vote for black men. The Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868, decreed that all people born in the United States were citizens who must enjoy equal protection of the law. But for the first time, the amendment introduced the word "male" into the Constitution, in a convoluted section related to voting. It punished states that failed to enfranchise black men with a loss of some of their seats in Congress. There was no penalty when women were denied suffrage. The Reconstruction Act and the Fifteenth Amendment barred states from denying the right to vote on the basis of race but left them free to do so because of gender.

These measures launched the era known as Radical Reconstruction, the first experiment in interracial democracy (for men) in our history. For the first time, large numbers of African-Americans voted and held office. Mississippi elected two black men to the Senate. (In the century and a half since, only three have followed, including Obama.)

But feminists like Stanton saw abolitionist support for these laws and amendments as a betrayal of the movement's long-standing commitment to full equality. A bitter controversy ensued, which resulted in Stanton and her supporters cutting their ties with their allies and forming an independent national organization to promote women's suffrage. They now felt free to appeal to racial and ethnic prejudices, arguing on occasion that native-born white women deserved the vote more than nonwhites and immigrants.

This episode has come down to us as the feminist-abolitionist split. But the story is more complicated. What actually happened was a split *within* the feminist movement. Nearly every black feminist supported the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments. So did many white women. Supporters believed these measures were necessary to protect all African-Americans from oppression in the aftermath of slavery. They saw the enfranchisement of black men as a step toward universal suffrage, not a retreat from it. Women like Abby Kelley, one of the era's greatest feminists, formed their own women's suffrage group, still linked to the abolitionist tradition. Not until the 1890s were the rival organizations reconciled.

The point is not that one position was right and one wrong—either in 1868 or 2008. During Reconstruction, both sides offered cogent arguments. One thing we can learn from their experience is that debating who is more oppressed is a fool's game. Advocates of the rights of African-Americans and women achieve more working together than fighting among themselves.

ERIC FONER

Eric Foner, DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University, is the author of many books, including, most recently, Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction.

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Two Primary-Season Versions of 'Hickory Dickory Dock'

Hillary, dillary dock.
Hil ran into Barack.
So Bill got shrill
Defending Hil.
Hillary, dillary dock.

Huckabee, duckabee dock.
Not Mike and not his flock
Have heard the news
Of Darwin's views.
Huckabee, duckabee dock.

Long *Roe* to Hoe

It's been thirty-five years since the Supreme Court put the jewel in the crown of reproductive rights and civil liberties in America by affirming in *Roe v. Wade* a woman's constitutional right to choose abortion. Immediately, the government authorized the use of Medicaid funds for poor women who choose abortion and the United States became a world leader in supporting reproductive health services.

COMMENT

Opposition to abortion, however, rapidly became the galvanizing issue in the emerging culture wars. Right-wing leaders from Senator Paul Laxalt to Paul Weyrich seized on abortion as a wedge issue to engage fundamentalist Christians in supporting the full agenda of the then–new right. Women are still paying the price for the success of this campaign. While *Roe* was not overturned, it was systematically eviscerated, and long-accepted reproductive health services such as birth control became controversial. These days the United States has one of the most punitive and regressive policies on reproductive health in the developed world. To reverse this turn to the far right, women's health advocates must seek not only to protect abortion rights but to restore the whole range of reproductive health services, pushing for this broader agenda to be at the center of any progressive platform.

Looking at Europe, we can see how things would be different if reproductive health policy attended to women's needs rather than the demands of a fundamentalist Christian right. Almost without exception, in Western European countries where abortions are legal, they are included in national health-care plans. They do not require parental consent or notice for adolescents seeking abortion; contraceptives are reasonably priced, covered by health insurance and often available without prescription; teens and adults have access to emergency

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contraception in hospitals or over the counter at pharmacies; and abstinence-only sex education is rare.

When European women choose to have babies, they generally get free prenatal care and excellent midwifery services and birthing options. They receive paid medical and family leave. Those who are unemployed, disabled or ill are not penalized for having children but receive adequate resources to care for their family. Single mothers who work have access to professional daycare.

And the countries with these policies have lower unintended pregnancy rates and thus lower abortion rates.

The major European development agencies do not seek to control social values in the countries that receive their aid, nor do they deny funding to agencies or countries where abstinence is not put forward as the only option for preventing either pregnancy or disease. Family-planning funds are not withheld if local agencies provide access to or support safe and legal abortion.

While prochoice and antiabortion groups in the United States have argued about the minutiae of abortion practice, women's economic security and reproductive health have been severely undermined by far-reaching changes in public policy. Given this broad assault on women, it is no longer ethically sound or politically wise to see abortion as the centerpiece of women's struggle for freedom and equality. In the "change" election of 2008, it is critical that all candidates who claim to be prochoice define choice more broadly. They must make a commitment to fully restoring reproductive health and dignity to all American women regardless of their economic status. Likewise, a commitment should be made to a foreign policy that supports these services and rights for women in the developing world.

The sorry state of US reproductive health policy also requires serious shifts within the women's and the abortion-rights movements, where we were privileged to serve as leaders for many years. So-called inside-the-Beltway strategies need to adopt a comprehensive progressive agenda that makes abortion rights and access part of the pursuit of justice for working and low-income women. Should the 2008 election result in a Democratic President and Congress, advocates need to insist on much more than we asked of the Clinton Administration. "Change" needs to go beyond the expansion of unpaid family and medical leave and the provision of emergency contraception to women who have been raped. Certain bottom-line commitments must be made not only by presidential candidates but by Congressional ones. These include commitments to paid family and medical leave; revocation of those aspects of welfare reform that penalize women with children and those who become pregnant while on public assistance; nationwide inclusion of abortion, family planning and emergency contraception for women in all national healthcare plans; and comprehensive, high-quality sex education and confidential reproductive healthcare for adolescents.

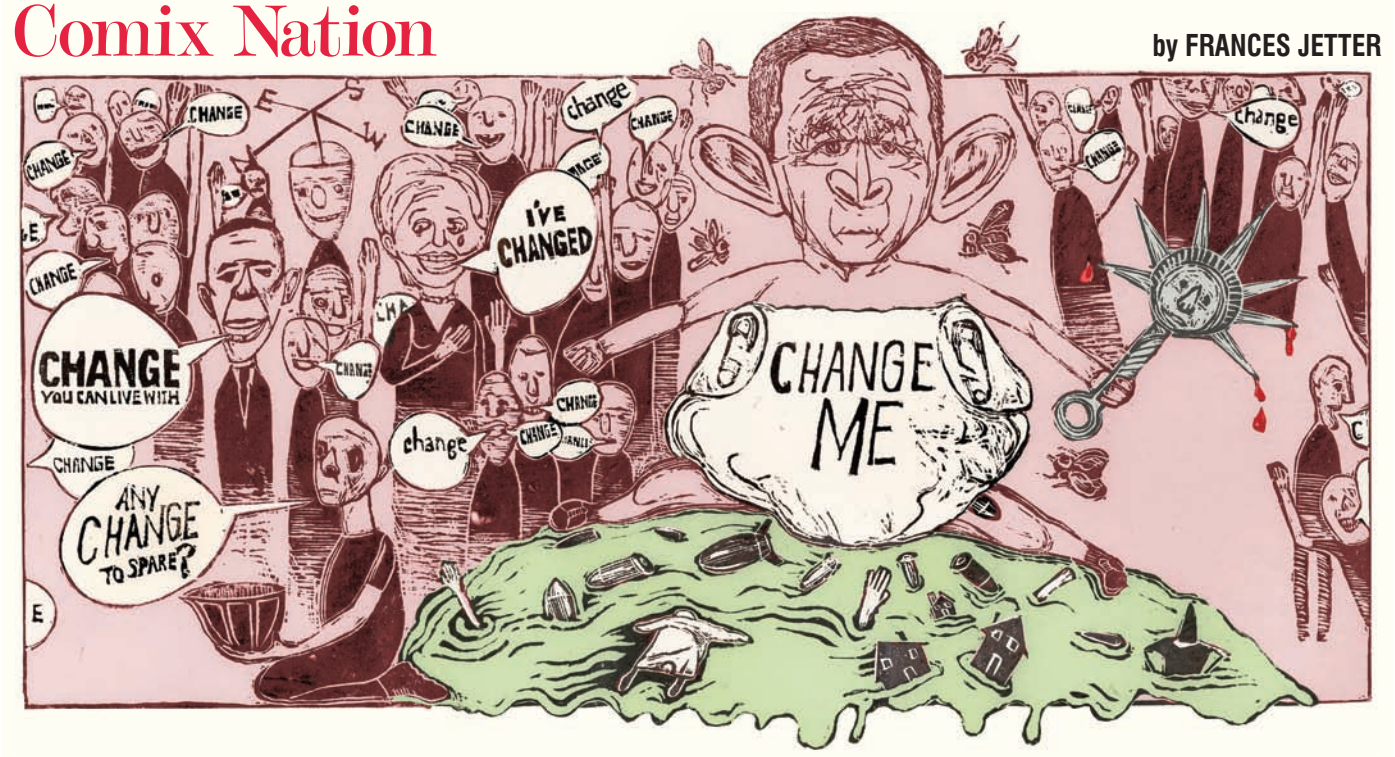
Having learned the hard way that Supreme Court decisions can fail us, we need to frame our case in the court of public opinion, and listen more attentively and respond more fully to the public's concern about men's as well as women's responsibilities to prevent unwanted pregnancies and to parent wisely and lovingly. *Roe v. Wade* was a socially transforming decision that in many ways was ahead of its time. For women much of the task of social transformation is still before us. And it will be achieved only when we truly engage the public on the many issues that will ensure women's equality and security.

FRANCES KISSLING AND KATE MICHELMAN

Frances Kissling and Kate Michelman were longtime presidents of, respectively, Catholics for a Free Choice and NARAL Pro-choice America. Michelman is the author of Protecting the Right to Choose.

Comix Nation

by FRANCES JETTER


CHANGE
CHANGE
CHANGE

Alexander Cockburn

Moody's: The Terrorist at Ground Zero

Terrorism flourishes brazenly at Ground Zero in the new 7 World Trade Center building. Here can be found a secretive entity of fabulous wealth and power. Kingdoms and corporations alike tremble at its shadow and make haste to pay it tribute. I refer to Moody's Investor Services, wholly owned subsidiary of Moody's Corporation, which reported $2.03 billion in revenues in 2006.

On January 10 Moody's, in concert with the other main bond-rating firm, Standard and Poor's, gave the United States its top AAA credit rating. The terrorist blackmail threat came in the form of a demand by Moody's that the US government "reform" Social Security and Medicare: "In the very long term, the rating could come under pressure if reform of Medicare and Social Security is not carried out as these two programs are the largest threats to the long-term financial health of the United States and to the government's AAA rating."

Steven Hess, Moody's top analyst for the US economy, spelled it out more explicitly to the London *Financial Times*: "If no policy changes are made, in 10 years from now we would have to look very seriously at whether the US is still a triple-A credit.... The US rating is the anchor of the world's financial system. If you have a downgrade, you have a problem." Thus does Moody's man calmly threaten to plant the financial equivalent of a thermonuclear device under the Statue of Liberty.

Moody's runs a protection game. It issues credit ratings (in 2007 covering no less than 39 percent of the global credit-rating market by revenue, according to Bloomberg) based on public data and private information made available by those clients that have "voluntarily" retained its services. The price of not volunteering can be high. As vividly reported in the *Washington Post* by Alec Klein in 2004, the giant German insurance corporation Hannover declined repeated Moody's offers to rate its credit. Moody's promptly issued an unsolicited and adverse rating, and then—just like a small-time mobster after hurling a brick through the window of a liquor store—went back to Hannover and reissued its invitation to offer protection-by-rating. Hannover's top man said he wouldn't surrender to blackmail, and so between 2001 and 2003 brick after brick went through the window as Moody's steadily reduced Hannover's rating all the way down to junk.

By contrast, Enron handled relations with Moody's with ermine gloves. Until days before Enron plunged into bankruptcy Moody's, like S&P, gallantly refused to lower the boom by demoting bonds issued by Enron to "below-investment grade." Banks with huge sums at stake allegedly pressured Moody's to keep quiet, even though Moody's had privileged access to Enron's internal financial operations.

Today, the world's credit system is strained to the bursting point by financial scams like collateralized debt obligations (CDOs)—bundles of debt instruments, ranging from junk bonds to subprime mortgages. Moody's and the other rating agencies have played a crucial role in putting the CDOs together.

Of course, the terrorists in Lower Manhattan want Wall Street to get its mitts on the pools of money held in the Social Security trust funds. But if Moody's is going to present itself as a major political player presuming to dictate national policy down the barrel of a financial gun, its executives and analysts should be hauled into the star chamber. Let's have a war on terror and a rendition of these Moody's executives before a special investigative committee of Congress with full subpoena power. Ask them to explain their own role in causing the financial upheavals afflicting the planet right now, due to the collapse of the housing bubble and its impact on the home mortgage market.

As Professor Robert Pollin of the University of Massachusetts remarked to me last week, "We could say the bubble and crisis occurred because outfits like Moody's rating agency always misread the buildup of bubbles. They assume the rise in asset prices represents something fundamentally different about the economy and then open the floodgates for financial speculation. Based on this we should rather be talking about stability of US and global financial markets coming under immediate pressure due to the fact that market analysts, like Moody's, don't have a clue as to what they are talking about."

The US deficit is now around $248 billion, 1.2 percent of the GDP, which is not large by recent historical measure and which presents no danger in itself to US financial soundness. But as Pollin adds, if Moody's analysts want to discuss causes of fiscal laxity, "why not look at the Iraq War? The defense budget for 2006 was $617 billion. That is 4.7 percent of a $13 trillion GDP. Before the Iraq War, the defense budget was about 3 percent of GDP. So Iraq is costing about $150 billion annually, about 1.1 percent of GDP. And what has it accomplished? Social Security and Medicare combined were about $900 billion in 2006. Why assume we first have to attack our minimal welfare state and leave the imperial budget intact?"

In fact, it's almost entirely Medicare, not Social Security, that accounts for the projected rising costs in our shriveled welfare state. The culprit here is not the swelling ranks of older people but the insurance and drug companies' grip on our health system. Conversion to single-payer would mean huge savings. The United States pays around 15 percent of its GDP for healthcare, about 70 percent more than the outlay of other advanced industrial countries. Shift to single-payer and quit shoving money—4.7 percent of the GDP—down the imperial sinkhole, and there's no fiscal crisis of any sort, short- or long-term, for Moody's or anyone else to fret about. And in the even shorter term, if Moody's sees fiscal crisis looming, why don't its overpaid executives for once put the national interest first and call for a tax hike on the rich? Pollin tells me that just going back to Clinton, as opposed to Bush 2, on taxes for those making more than $200,000 a year would generate $60 billion a year. Do this and end the war in Iraq and you wipe out the deficit at a stroke.

Let a real war on terror commence. ■

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Katha Pollitt

The Weepy Witch & the Secret Muslim

The media are hopelessly sexist and relentlessly trivial. So much we've learned from the mass hysteria over Hillary Clinton's "emotional moment" in New Hampshire. (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* columnist Robert L. Jamieson: "She morphed into a 'compassion brand'—like, irony of ironies, Kleenex"; *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd: "Can Hillary Cry Her Way Back to the White House?") Even Southern charmer John Edwards couldn't resist observing that a commander in chief needed "strength and resolve"—a view echoed by Fox commentator Dick Morris ("There could well come a time when there is such a serious threat to the United States that she breaks down") and given full misogynous display by nationally syndicated cartoonist Pat Oliphant's "Madam President Meets the Bad Guys," portraying a dumpy, tearful Hillary surrounded by Osama, Kim Jong Il and similar. All this fuss over a welling of the eyes so brief that if you blinked your own you'd miss it. I have moments like that every day! This was the Dean Scream all over again: a nano-nothing whipped into a self-congratulatory media typhoon.

In the 24/7 chat room, reality never dawns: the narrative is tweaked, not junked. Thus, when Hillary dared to win the New Hampshire primary although pundits had already gleefully hustled her off the stage, the script was quickly rewritten from Tears Sink Woman to Tears Save Woman: 46 percent of women voters, the silly dears, supported a "humanized" Hillary, according to exit polls. (Bill Maher: "They wanted to see the robot cry.") But maybe women supported Hillary this one time to protest cable blowhards like Chris Matthews, who capped his long career of insane Hillary hatred with this zinger: "The reason she's a front-runner is because her husband messed around." Or perhaps, as Susan Faludi and Gail Collins suggested, middle-aged women see in Hillary a calm and competent multitasker like themselves. Lost in the kerfuffle: Hillary won not only among women but also among voters over 40 and those without a college degree.

I've written many times about sexist attacks on Hillary Clinton as an old, ugly, castrating witch-and-what-rhymes-with-it, but Gloria Steinem's *New York Times* op-ed in defense of her, "Women Are Never the Front-Runners," was not helpful, to put it mildly. "Gender is probably the most restricting force in American life," Steinem wrote. "Black men were given the vote a half-century before women of any race were allowed to mark a ballot, and generally have ascended to positions of power, from the military to the boardroom, before any women (with the possible exception of obedient family members in the latter)." Yes, black men got the vote first, although they could be lynched for using it. Shirley Chisholm, the black Congresswoman who ran for President in 1972, did famously write, "Of my two handicaps, being female put many more obstacles in my path than being black." But Barack Obama is only the third black senator in the modern era; Deval Patrick is only the second black governor. It may be true, as Steinem suggests, that "the sex barrier [is] not taken as seriously as the racial one." But that doesn't mean the racial barrier really is less serious. It just means that the public expression of racism is beyond the pale in a way that the public expression of misogyny is not.

True, nobody's likely to compare Obama to Kleenex; there will be no cartoons involving watermelon and fried chicken. Instead, as his campaign becomes more of a threat, opponents will try to remove his "postracial" mantle. Already, e-mails circulate claiming he's a secret Muslim who took the oath of office on a Koran—indeed these rumors are so widespread MSNBC's Brian Williams asked Obama about them in the Nevada debate. Hillary's campaign strategist Mark Penn, and Hillary supporters black billionaire Robert Johnson and Representative Charles Rangel, have reminded the world of Obama's self-confessed teenage drug experiences. (The Clinton campaign claimed that when Johnson referred to Obama "doing something in the neighborhood—I won't say what he was doing, but he said it in the book," he merely meant community organizing. Yeah, right.) Most recently, *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen, mainstreaming attacks that have been bubbling for weeks in the right-wing blogosphere, floated the question of anti-Semitism because Obama belongs to a black megachurch run by the Rev. Jeremiah Wright Jr., whose house magazine last year honored Louis Farrakhan. "It's important to state right off that nothing in Obama's record suggests he harbors anti-Semitic views," Cohen writes, before going on to suggest exactly that. "I don't for a moment think that Obama shares Wright's views on Farrakhan. But the rap on Obama is that he is a fog of a man. We know little about him, and, for all my admiration of him, I wonder about his mettle." (In fact, Obama has denounced anti-Semitism many times and has said of Wright, "We don't agree on everything.") Meanwhile, Mitt Romney practices Mormonism, which until a 1978 "revelation" explicitly preached black inferiority and is still explicitly sexist in about a thousand ways. Mike Huckabee gets a free pass from the media for being a Southern Baptist minister who in 1998 went on record supporting the denomination's new doctrine of wifely submission.

Barring an Edwards upset, the Democratic Party is going to nominate either a white woman or a black man as its presidential candidate. This is indeed a testament to how far we have come. Still, it wouldn't take much innuendo and truth-twisting to turn Barack Obama into the Muslim Al Sharpton—surely no more than it's taken to turn Hillary Clinton into the lesbian Lady Macbeth. That's why it's crucial not to get into an oppression sweepstakes. If the campaign becomes a competition between race and gender—Frederick Douglass versus Elizabeth Cady Stanton, as one *New York Times* graphic put it—the winner on election day will be whichever white man the Republican Party nominates. ■

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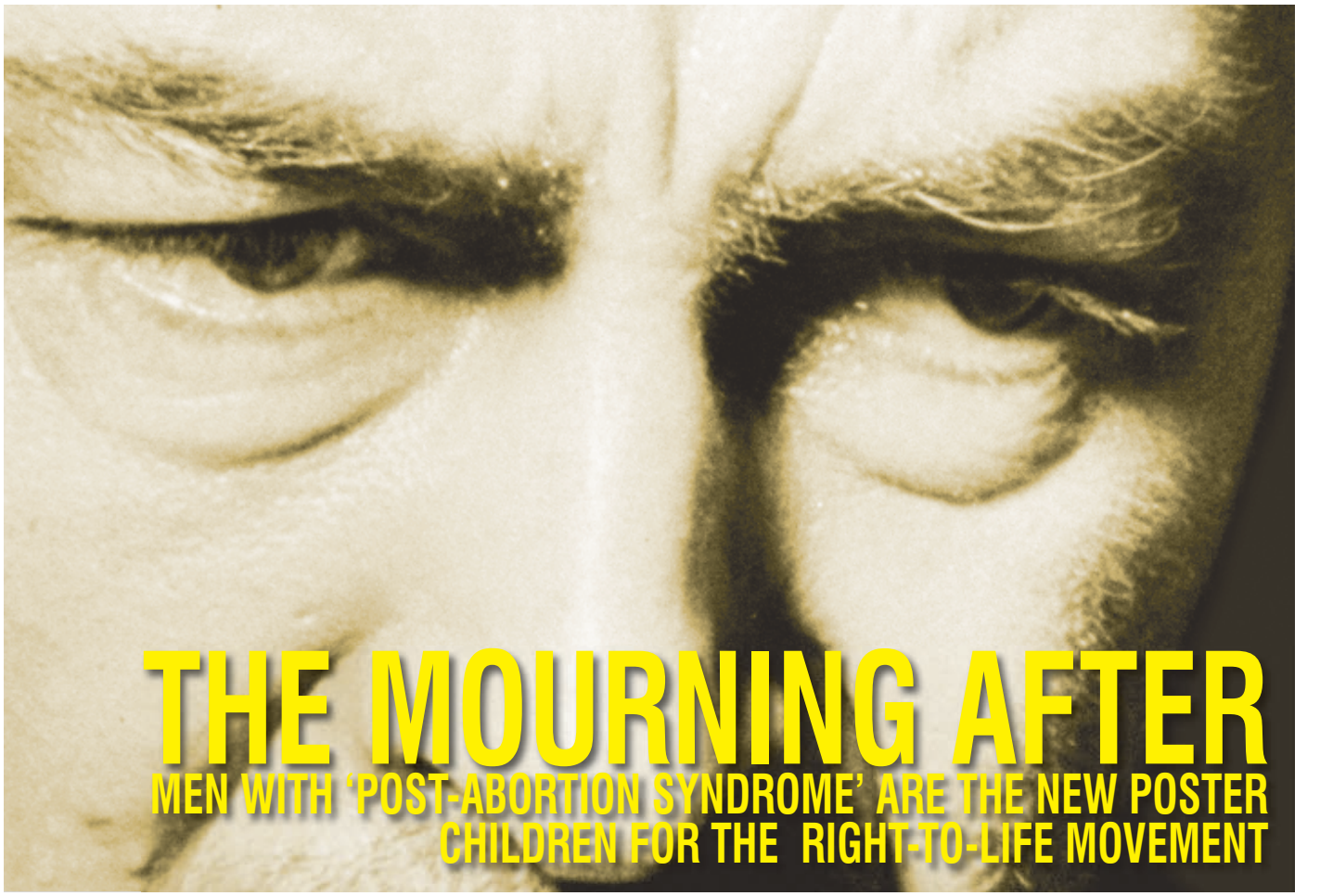

THE MOURNING AFTER

MEN WITH 'POST-ABORTION SYNDROME' ARE THE NEW POSTER CHILDREN FOR THE RIGHT-TO-LIFE MOVEMENT

by SARAH BLUSTAIN

Pity the man who conceived four babies with four women and suffered anxiety attacks and nightmares after all four, with his consent, were aborted. Pity the man who saw his soon-to-be-born baby on an ultrasound and instantly came to believe that he "had killed two of my own kids" through abortion. Pity the man who abused alcohol after his girlfriend aborted. Pity the man who suffered a nervous breakdown, depression, psychosis and nearly suicide after his girlfriend had an abortion despite his pleas.

And pity these men who, wittingly or not, are allowing their pain to be co-opted for political gain. Whatever the cause of their suffering, it is real and they deserve support. But they are also the new face of the antiabortion movement: Post-Abortion Syndrome—for men. In conferences and counseling, they're being wrapped in the fuzzy blankets of men's healing, but behind these men and their stories are the same crackpot research, coercive counseling and policy-by-anecdote that have defined the antiabortion movement's tactical emphasis on women's suffering after abortion. It's a maxim among the anti-choice crowd these days that there are "two victims of abortion"; the men's PAS movement wants to take that to three.

A casual prochoice activist might dismiss this movement out of hand. After all, politically speaking there's no great constituency for men's PAS. The men's rights movement—which fights to improve men's standing in custody, child support and fatherhood-related issues, on which they say the law favors women—doesn't particularly embrace men's PAS: men's rights advocates are divided on abortion, and besides, some say, the pain of losing a child to abortion simply doesn't measure up to the pain of losing one's born children. Plus, the Supreme Court has definitively told men, including husbands, that they have no rights when it comes to abortion, which leaves anti-choice activists no judicial openings to revive, for instance, spousal notification laws.

Still, it's clear that men's PAS is a syndrome whose moment has come. The first conference dealing with men's pain after abortion was held in San Francisco last fall, and the National Right to Life Committee included men's PAS in its annual convention last summer. Many counseling centers dealing with women's postabortion suffering now include resources for men, while activist groups are collecting men's testimonies about their postabortion suffering for use in the courts.

This isn't all just coincidence, and it's not all about healing. Post-Abortion Syndrome has rocked the antiabortion world. It has given new humanity to a movement that even a decade ago seemed locked in violence and lacking in empathy. More important, by blaming abortion for divorce and child abuse, depression and drug use, sex addiction and suicide, it has given conservatives a very distinct culprit in the disintegration of American family values—and another argument for ending the thirty-five-year reign of *Roe v. Wade*.

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Reverend Jesse Jackson is a longstanding **Nation** *reader.*

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Time was, fighting abortion was about the unborn: think "pro-life," and images of clinic protesters and posters of fetuses come to mind. But the softer side of the movement has been growing, embodied first and foremost in the argument that abortion hurts women. "Abortion hurts women" was a major rallying cry in the effort to ban abortion in South Dakota and other states, and in numerous informed-consent legislative efforts. Most recently, it is the target of "scientific" investigation by Missouri Governor Matt Blunt's Task Force on the Impact of Abortion on Women, convened in October and made up of abortion foes only.

In a coup for PAS advocates, Justice Anthony Kennedy echoed their argument in the Supreme Court's *Gonzales v. Carhart* decision, which upheld the "partial birth" abortion ban. "Whether to have an abortion requires a difficult and painful moral decision…[which] some women come to regret," he wrote, not specifying but clearly referring to the assumptions of devastating harm. "In a decision so fraught with emotional consequence," he argued, "the State's interest in respect for life is advanced" by disclosing "the consequences that follow from a decision to elect a late-term abortion." Oddly, Kennedy asserted that not just pregnant women but everyone—"the political and legal systems, the medical profession, expectant mothers, and society as a whole"—would benefit from such disclosure. And one didn't sense late-term was his only concern: while acknowledging the dearth of "reliable data" regarding abortion, Kennedy signaled that if faced with better evidence that the procedure hurts women, he might give it a second look.

The problem, of course, is that Post-Abortion Syndrome, as the mixture of purported symptoms has become known, does not exist. As a disease, it is the bastard child of post-traumatic stress syndrome, which officially became a psychological disorder in 1980. PAS proponents claim that many women—maybe epidemic numbers of women—who have had abortions experience guilt, shame, lowered self-esteem, insomnia, nightmares, flashbacks, anger toward men, sexual dysfunction, depression and even suicidal thoughts or attempts; to cope, these women often turn to alcohol or drugs or sexual promiscuity; marriages often fall apart. Activists also claim a strong association between abortion and child abuse: willingness to harm the unborn, the logic goes, leads to a willingness to harm the born.

The data to prove the existence of PAS come from a combination of deeply flawed original research—featuring tiny samples and lack of controls—and the manipulation of large samples into correlations from which pseudo-researchers claim causation. Among the most prominent forms of "data" circulating in the American political system are a few thousand PAS testimonies collected with the express purpose of being used in court to help overturn *Roe v. Wade*—hardly a scientific sample.

This is not to say that some people don't experience mixed emotions after abortion. Indeed, experts suggest that complex feelings after abortion are common and compare these to similar dynamics around marriage, childbearing and other major life decisions.

But PAS advocates aren't talking about everyday ambivalence or even sadness: they're talking about devastating, life-changing pathology, which mainstream research simply does not support. Post-Abortion Syndrome does not exist in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the widely used guide to accepted disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). Meanwhile, the American Psychological Association convened a task force that is completing a major review of all the postabortion research; this year it is expected to offer a serious critique of those studies and the methodologies used to compose them. Indeed, studies tend to show that the biggest predictor of postabortion troubles is preabortion troubles. Of the link between abortion and postabortion psychological problems, Nada Stotland, president-elect of the APA, says "it's a dead horse."

Post-Abortion Syndrome, as the mixture of purported symptoms has become known, does not exist. But PAS has political legs.

But the weakness of PAS as a psychological disorder does not slow its spread: the syndrome has political legs.

Among the hundreds of panels at the National Right to Life Committee's annual conference last July was one on "Lost Fatherhood," focusing on the grief of "post-abortive" men. Then in November, the Knights of Columbus and the Archdiocese of San Francisco sponsored the first conference on Post-Abortion Syndrome among men. Titled "Reclaiming Fatherhood," it was set up as a "safe space" for men healing from abortion. "You might need tissues," organizer Vicki Thorn, founder of the Catholic Church's post-abortion counseling project, Project Rachel, and founder and head of the nonprofit National Office of Post-Abortion Reconciliation, told the group as the conference began. "Give yourself the time and space to unwind, because you don't want to leave here so uptight because of the pain and suffering you heard."

Held in the basement of St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco, the gathering of 175 participants from nine countries was filled with gentle talk in gentle tones, typical of the conversation around men's PAS these days. Vincent Rue, an amiable psychology-professor type and the dean of PAS research, whose two presentations were the centerpieces of the conference, opened one of his talks invoking T.S. Eliot's "Hollow Men" as a metaphor for postabortive men: "Remember us—if at all—not as lost/ Violent souls, but only/ As the hollow men/ The stuffed men."

It was that kind of conference. The presenters who spoke included not activists or strategists but Christian-oriented counselors, men's healing gurus, a priest and two researchers, includ-

Sarah Blustain is a senior editor at The New Republic. *Research support for this article was provided by the Investigative Fund of The Nation Institute.*

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ing Rue, who directs the Florida-based Institute for Pregnancy Loss. Indeed, before the event prochoice activists had talked about protesting the conference but decided it wasn't the right atmosphere for confrontation.

The first four speakers were all "postabortive men," and they had all had a hard row to hoe. One of them was Jason Baier, now head of the Fatherhood Forever Foundation, who gave a heartfelt biography of his pre- and postabortion life: his secular Catholic upbringing, his parents' divorce, his "very low self-esteem." He told of joining the Air Force, going wild, drinking a bottle of Jack Daniel's every night and having sex with anyone who would. When his girlfriend got pregnant, he said, "I did everything I could to plead with her not to have the abortion." He said he offered to raise the child himself, but she aborted anyway. A nervous breakdown followed, then violent fighting with and separation from his girlfriend, diagnosis of severe depression and psychosis, cocaine and marijuana use and, nearly, a suicide. All, he told the group, because of "what I had lost."

Individually, it is difficult to turn a deaf ear to these histories. But the stories that men's PAS activists present are strikingly homogeneous and uncannily close to familiar conservative culture-war narratives: indulgence in the dissolute mainstream culture, confrontation with abortion, unraveling and then some sort of redemption. Of the millions of men who have been exposed to abortion's harmful potential, a goodly number will be those who pushed the woman to abort; these men, down the road, will suffer extreme guilt. Another goodly number will be those whose partners aborted either without telling them or even though they begged for the life of the child; these men will suffer from extreme grief.

Those who treat PAS in men appear to be leading them to blame their abortion experiences for pre-existing or subsequent problems.

And if women's pain from abortion has been ignored, men's has been ignored all the more because men have been marginalized in our feminist, feminized society. Here the story gets entwined with traditional, and essentialized, ways of seeing men. Because a man's instinct is to protect and provide for his offspring, his very masculinity is challenged when his child, born or unborn, is killed. And because men tend to deny their emotions—their "pain is taboo in our culture," said one conference presenter—they avoid thinking about abortion. Their "impacted grief," exposed as anger, leads them down many nasty roads—inability to connect with others being a key one but also abuse of drugs or alcohol, sex addiction, impotence, abuse of pornography, depression. Finding God seems to be one thing that helps.

Over and over again in the basement of St. Mary's, PAS men and researchers alike argued by anecdote: "You cannot debate an experience," one said. "Testimonies don't lie," said another. "We can't fight the game of numbers," said a third.

And it's true: you cannot debate an anecdote. But you can debate a generalization, and there are many problems with theirs. To begin with, if the science on women's PAS is bad, what exists on men is junk. Mainstream researchers, psychologists and professors agree there is no valid research on PAS and men. Even Catherine Coyle, a researcher who has devoted herself to proving that abortion has widespread deleterious effects, said at the San Francisco gathering that the twenty-eight studies of men and abortion undertaken since 1973 are marred by small sample size, poor measurement tools, lack of control groups and other methodological flaws.

Second, listening to those who treat PAS in men, you realize that they are leading men to blame their abortion experiences for pre-existing and subsequent problems—in ways that mental health experts, including the APA's Stotland, compare to the role of therapists in generating the epidemic of recovered memories of sexual abuse in the 1990s.

Indeed, getting men to accept the PAS claims usually entails breaking down their denial of their emotions. Greg Hasek, executive director of the Misty Mountain Family Counseling Center in Portland, Oregon, organized the 2005 Men's Summit on PAS in Kansas City, Missouri, where he helped create the Men and Abortion Network, a men's PAS task force. He is one of the men's PAS speakers making the rounds, including in San Francisco, and with his fast talk and in-your-face manner, his approach is an awful lot like that of a used car salesman.

Since 2001 Hasek has seen thirty-five to forty men a week. He says he is now testing his hypothesis that postabortion men are at increased risk for sexual addiction. "What the pornographers in this country and the abortionists in this country don't want us to do is put the dots together," he proclaimed. Luckily, Hasek will do that for us. If a man walks into his clinic, the counselor explained, that client fills out a form that includes a question about abortion. That's step one: since half the men who fill out this form, says Hasek, have abortion in their past, he's got a pretty large population to work on. The next step is getting over denial about the abortion's impact. There are a lot of ways to do this. Sometimes he asks the man to draw a picture of what the aborted child might have looked like today. If that doesn't work, he plays sentimental music. "Guys can't withstand it," he told the conference; they cry. And if that doesn't work, he might take the guy to a playground and ask him to think about how old the child would be, to see if the guy can "connect" to his grief that way.

It's hard to get past the sheer fabrications—of data and emotions—that are going on in the men's PAS movement. But the bigger picture is worth seeing: PAS is a political strategy masquerading as a psychological crisis. And men's PAS is that and then some.

That's because in addition to suffering from the effects of abortion, postabortive men are also suffering from the effects of feminism. The clues to this culture-war agenda are hidden throughout the men's PAS materials. The San Francisco conference was speckled with references to being "politically incorrect" with a sort of glee at confronting the culture head-on; it was filled with oblique references to what the women's movement has done to men's emotional lives—a grown-up version

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of Christina Hoff Sommers's *The War Against Boys*. Did you know, for instance, that the form of women's healing is a "bowl," while the form of men's healing is a "spear"? (Subtle, this.) Or that women heal through communication, while men heal through action? Because of the protocols of modern therapy, the story goes, men are essentially battered into women's ways of healing, and they are deprived of an outlet for true healing.

More important, the men's PAS healers share with their colleagues in the broader men's movement a distinct sense that on parental issues, the legal system is stacked against them. "When it comes to reproduction in America today," wrote fathers' rights columnist Glenn Sacks about a man's failed bid to block his ex-girlfriend's abortion, "women have rights and men merely have responsibilities." It is the most common lament of men's rights activists: if a woman decides to have a child, a man must support her for eighteen years, but if a woman decides not to have a child, through abortion, a man has no say. "With the widespread acceptance of abortion," declared Rue in San Francisco, "equality is aborted."

Men's PAS healers share with their colleagues in the broader men's movement a distinct sense that the legal system is stacked against them.

But the movement finds itself in a bit of a muddle when it comes to figuring out what to do about this double standard. Men's rights activists have mainly worked on issues with born children: custody rights, child support. The issue of men's reproductive rights is more complicated. It took the spotlight briefly a few years ago, when Dalton Conley, then-director of New York University's Center for Advanced Social Science Research, argued on the op-ed page of the *New York Times*, "If a father is willing to legally commit to raising a child with no help from the mother he should be able to obtain an injunction against the abortion of the fetus he helped create." (One prominent fathers' rights lawyer, Jeffery Leving, did persuade an Illinois judge some years back "to enjoin a pregnant woman from removing a child from the state's jurisdiction." In other words, the judge forbade the abortion.)

This is, of course, the most radical possible direction, one that seems blind to the problem of forcing women to be vessels for unwanted children. It also raises a problem for the antiabortion crowd. Says Baier of the Fatherhood Forever Foundation, "If you are going to give men the right to prevent it [abortion], you are also going to give men the right to force it." Mel Feit, director of The National Center for Men, proposes to resolve that conundrum with what he calls a "*Roe v. Wade* for men." Feit, who describes himself as prochoice, believes that when a man and woman have agreed not to have children and a woman becomes pregnant, a man should have, within a week or ten days, the opportunity to relinquish, through the courts, his rights and responsibilities to be a parent to that child, just as a woman has the opportunity to end her potential parenthood through abortion.

While men's rights and PAS activists work out this rights puzzle, however, there is a more overtly politicized effort with regard to men's PAS in the works: the collection of legally valid declarations, sometimes notarized, from men and women telling their postabortion stories. The Texas-based Operation Outcry spearheaded this effort among women starting in 2004, and hundreds of these testimonies were entered into the legislative hearings in South Dakota and almost every other state that has considered an abortion ban in the past several years, as well as in court cases around the country. It is now collecting men's affidavits as well. "The Supreme Court is listening!" the project's website reads. "Help us collect a million declarations so we can show the Supreme Court how many have been hurt by abortion."

After the *Carhart* decision, Yale University law professor Jack Balkin blogged that thanks to the Kennedy opinion, "the new rhetoric of pro-life forces is no longer just rhetoric. It's now part of Supreme Court doctrine." In fact, the collection project specifically cites Kennedy's comment that there are "no reliable data" on PAS and states that the "most effective way to show the Court the magnitude of the problem is to collect a much larger number of testimonies."

Beyond men, PAS is becoming a family affair. There's some talk of PAS for siblings, otherwise known as Post-Abortion Survivor Syndrome, which is said to mimic guilt and fear suffered by Holocaust survivors. A combination of these emotions, writes Philip Ney, a prominent antiabortion researcher, "may result in angry, narcissistic, destructive young people. There are millions of abortion survivors who are all too ready to destroy or be destroyed." Ney and others are also working on PAS for grandparents who, "having aborted some of their children or having urged their children to abort… [will] have a deep fear of retaliation."

Suddenly, using nothing but anecdote framed in scientific forms, a single abortion has not one victim, or even two, but three or four or five. And beyond that, millions of abortions have millions of victims: one in four women, and by extension one in four men, and one in four parents, and countless children, until society itself is a victim, filled with all sorts of personal and interpersonal tragedies of divorce, drug use and suicide from which we—all Americans—need protection.

And that becomes a justification for many things: for banning abortion; for spousal notification laws, currently deemed unconstitutional (though the new Supreme Court, in a new political climate, could change that); for compelling women to hear fabricated dangers in the name of "informed consent"; for coercing women into carrying children they do not wish to bear; even for murder—the very kind of violent strategy that had seemed to be replaced by the empathetic stance of PAS.

In a surreal moment in San Francisco in November, Vincent Rue interwove his compassionate PowerPoint presentation on the suffering of the hollow men with a strange selection of text that flashed brightly on a black screen. It read: "'He was upset because it was his child and he was not consulted. It just broke him. When he found out about it, it just flipped him out.' —Emaline Kopp, Stepmother of James Kopp who killed NY abortion provider Dr. Slepian."

Now we understand. Pity the man. ■

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Peter N. Stearns is Provost and Professor of History at George Mason University. He received a Bachelor's degree *summa cum laude*, a Master's degree, and a doctorate in History from Harvard University. He has written widely about world history. While at Carnegie Mellon, he won the Smith Award for Teaching and Educational Service in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, as well as the Spencer Award for Distinguished Teaching.

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Experts in Terror

Since 9/11, self-styled authorities have helped frame the "war on terror." Who are they?

by PETRA BARTOSIEWICZ

DAUPO

The defense attorneys had heard something about terrorism expert Evan Kohlmann. He was young and inexperienced, he spoke little Arabic and he would say whatever the government prosecutors wanted him to say. Now they saw him stepping into the witness box, snaggletoothed, pale, with a shock of brown hair combed boyishly over his forehead.

"Do you think he still lives with his parents?" one attorney joked to another. By the time Kohlmann finished testifying, they were no longer laughing.

When he was a college freshman and just starting out in the terrorism-expert business, Kohlmann earned the nickname "the Doogie Howser of terrorism," a reference to the '90s sitcom character, a child prodigy doctor. These days Kohlmann earns part of his living and much of his renown in federal court as the prosecution's star expert witness in terrorism trials. The Doogie Howser of terrorism is extremely effective at what he does. In the seven cases in the United States in which he has taken the stand since 2004, the jury has seven times voted the defendants guilty. (In one of those cases, the jury found the defendant guilty in a second trial where Kohlmann again testified.) At least five additional trials in which he has served as background consultant for the government ended in guilty verdicts. At the age of 29, Kohlmann can claim a hand in meting out at least one life sentence and more than 100 cumulative years of hard prison time in the "war on terror."

Kohlmann is among the most prominent examples of a post-9/11 phenomenon in which self-styled experts service the government's need for assistance in terrorism cases. These experts furnish law-enforcement agencies, the media and the public with their insights on Muslim extremism, and they have emerged to significantly affect the way the "war on terror" is framed, investigated and prosecuted.

Far from being mere analogues to forensic pathologists matching DNA to a drop of blood in a courtroom, these new experts are frequently unabashedly ideological. Their viewpoints, when they publish them, tend to find homes in partisan publications like *National Review* and the *Wall Street Journal*'s editorial page. Hamas expert Matthew Levitt, who has testified for the government in eight trials since 2004, has a day job at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), a conservative think tank founded by the former research director of AIPAC, the powerful pro-Israel lobby. Steven Emerson, the veritable godfather of terrorism experts and founder of the Investigative Project on Terrorism (where Kohlmann got his start), has served as a government source on many terrorism-related trials and is bankrolled by arch right-winger Richard Mellon Scaife. Rita Katz, another Emerson alumna and one of the few who actually speak Arabic, fled Iraq as a child after Saddam Hussein executed her father, as a suspected Israeli spy. Today she runs the SITE (Search for International Terrorist Entities) Intelligence Group, a private terrorism watchdog that has relied on tens of thousands in Defense Department contracts. For his part, Kohlmann, who runs a private website, globalterroralert.com, signed more than $135,000 in Justice Department contracts last year.

"They all work for the government or they work for government-funded agencies or government-contracted projects," says defense attorney William Swor, who investigated Kohlmann's background in connection with the trial of Jose Padilla. "And so when the government calls them, they are a ready source of government-approved information."

The government has skillfully deployed its experts to augment what are often narrow criminal charges having at best a tangential connection to terrorism. The approach has worked especially well when it has been possible to invoke Al Qaeda—although a string of recent mistrials and acquittals, most notably in the terrorism-financing trial of the Holy Land Foundation and the Liberty Seven bombing case, suggests that juries may be growing weary of it.

Since the 9/11 attacks, few terrorism cases have gone to trial in federal court. While high-value detainees generally languish in military custody, most lower-level defendants who land in the federal system take quick stock of the political zeitgeist and plead out to lesser charges. What the remaining cases invariably lack is a live terrorist plot, an omission that is often addressed through the use of sting operations. In the politically charged post-9/11 lexicon, these are known as "pre-emptive prosecutions," and they purport to snag the bad guys before they act. The cases turn on comparatively

Petra Bartosiewicz, a freelance writer living in Brooklyn, New York, is writing a book on the Justice Department's terrorism trials since 9/11. *Research support for this article was provided by the Investigative Fund of The Nation Institute.*

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lower-level charges like money laundering, leaving prosecutors to make the terrorism connection for jurors. This is where experts like Kohlmann take the stage to deliver what can best be described as the Big Terrorism Picture, a narrative that varies slightly from trial to trial but is comforting in its simplicity.

The Big Terrorism Picture was front and center in one of Kohlmann's early courtroom appearances, the 2005 trial of Ali al-Timimi, a cancer researcher and Muslim activist in northern Virginia. Timimi was the accused "spiritual leader" of the Virginia Paintball jihadists, a group of young Muslims who traveled to Pakistan in the wake of the 9/11 attacks to attend terrorist training camps. Timimi's involvement boiled down to comments he made shortly after the attacks in which, according to the prosecution, he exhorted the men to wage jihad against the United States, a version of events vigorously disputed by the defense. Prosecutors sought to make a connection between Al Qaeda and an insurgent group called Lashkar-e-Taiba, which hosted the training camps where some of the men ended up.

"The Al Qaeda connection was critical," Timimi's defense attorney Edward MacMahon Jr. told me. "If a jury in the US finds any connection between your client and Osama bin Laden, you're going to get convicted. So Kohlmann provides key testimony in the case that the US bombed an Al Qaeda terror camp in Afghanistan in 1998 and there was a member of Lashkar-e-Taiba in the training camp. That was the connection, and when Timimi was telling the [other defendants] to go to Pakistan, what he was really telling them was to go to Al Qaeda. What Kohlmann really did for the prosecutors was to tie it all up in a big bow." Timimi was found guilty on all counts at the trial, which took place in a courtroom seven miles from the Pentagon, and sentenced to life in prison.

"The government has been effective with these expert witnesses because they do paint a compelling picture, and the defense hasn't been as effective at bringing in experts to refute what the prosecution's experts are saying," said Bruce Hoffman, one of the most senior terrorism experts working today. A former head of the Washington office of the RAND Corporation, Hoffman wrote the seminal book *Inside Terrorism*; but when I asked him if he would take the stand in a terrorism case in the United States, he said no. "I have to bring added value," he said. "I don't want to be a mouthpiece or have anyone put added words into my mouth or base anything on hearsay."

Other seasoned terrorism experts, too, expressed reservations about giving testimony about terrorist groups whose ties to the defendant may be tenuous at best. At issue is the crucial element of context, particularly in pre-emptive prosecutions that focus on what a defendant might do. In these cases, proving intent requires understanding of a defendant's beliefs and motivations, to say nothing of the complex root causes of terrorism. And yet Kohlmann dismissed the idea that "social causes" are integral to terrorism expertise and told me he intentionally does not study up on the details of the cases he's asked to testify on. "I try to avoid learning about what the defendants may have done that's irrelevant to my testimony," he said. "Whether I'm asked to present by the prosecution or by the defense, you would hear the exact same thing out of my mouth." This may be true, and Kohlmann, unlike some of his colleagues, does not display a clear political or ideological bent. But his testimony has the same impact as those who do. It is not surprising that in every case, it has been the prosecution and not the defense that has come calling.

I met Kohlmann last fall in the West Village in Manhattan, where he lives and works out of a high-rise apartment. In his youthful face, the eyes stood apart: they were hollowed out, exhausted looking. "If you wanted to write an encyclopedia entry, the longest encyclopedia entry you could think of about a terrorist group, that's what I do," he said. He relies on "open source" data, which means he spends his days mostly surfing the Internet, monitoring jihadist chat rooms and, less frequently, interviewing the terrorists themselves. One of the sacred tomes on his bookshelf, he says, is *Google Hacks*, a guide to finding information using the Google search engine.

In person Kohlmann is charming and a fast talker who rattles off insurgent names and affiliations like a kid who has memorized every conceivable statistic about his favorite baseball team. His reservoir of knowledge is vast—if not deep—and has earned him plenty of respect, including an on-air gig as a terrorism analyst for MSNBC. In 2006 he was cited in the acknowledgments to Lawrence Wright's Pulitzer Prize–winning book on Al Qaeda, *The Looming Tower*. "He's young and he's earnest, but don't mistake that earnestness," Wright told me. "Within the field that he's chosen for himself, he's become a scholar. You might complain about lack of qualifications, but I looked online and there are only three PhD theses on Al Qaeda. The truth is, the American academy just hasn't risen to the occasion."

Jessica Stern, a professor of public policy at Harvard University who recently published a book based on four years of field interviews with insurgent leaders, says simply siphoning raw data from Internet chat rooms fails to take a complex view of terrorism. "They are reading what the terrorists say about themselves, and there's lots of disinformation there," she said of Kohlmann and Katz.

A trial in Albany, New York, where Kohlmann testified in 2006, is a case study in how this decontextualized approach, while effective in netting a conviction, fails to serve the greater truth. Two Muslim men, Yassin Aref and Mohammed Hossain, were accused of laundering the proceeds of a missile sale. Neither had a criminal record. Aref, a United Nations refugee, was an imam at a local mosque; Hossain was a local pizza shop owner. The case against them was constructed through an FBI sting spearheaded by an informant with a lengthy criminal record who claimed that the missile was to be used to assassinate the Pakistani ambassador to the United States. The plot, of course, was entirely fictitious, and the informant's conversation with the two defendants was so vague and in such broken English that it was never clear whether they had any idea what exactly was afoot.

At trial, prosecutors sought to tie the two men to two Southeast Asian groups with extremist factions, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), on the thinnest of reeds. During the sting the government's informant asked Aref, in his capacity as imam, whether he should donate money to

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JEM given its violent history. When Hossain was asked about JEM, he thought it was a music group. As for JeI, it turned out that Hossain's wife had briefly been a member while in college.

Kohlmann, who has no specific expertise in JeI or JEM, got the call to testify while in a cab in New York City. The next morning he was in Albany meeting with the FBI case agents. When defense attorneys interviewed him a few days later, he acknowledged that much of his expert report, which he had prepared over a single weekend, was gleaned from the Internet. Toward the end of the interview he was asked some basic questions about one of the groups he was to testify about, the Bangladeshi arm of JeI. He admitted he had never interviewed any members of the group. He was unable to name the paramilitary elements of the group or even recent major political parties in Bangladesh. "Sorry, can't tell ya," he finally said.

By the time Kohlmann took the stand before the jury a few days later, he'd smoothed out the rough edges. "His testimony was devastating," said Kevin Luibrand, Hossain's attorney. "He had an ability to pronounce Middle Eastern names with a fluidity that made the jury believe he knew what he was talking about." A few weeks later, both defendants were convicted of material support to terrorism.

When the sentencing rolled around this past March, I met with the lead FBI agent on the case, Tim Coll, who carried with him a copy of the latest book by Kohlmann's former employer and early mentor, Steven Emerson. The book, *Jihad Incorporated: A Guide to Militant Islam in the U.S.*, a compendium of the current terrorist presence here, is blurbed by the likes of Richard Clarke, former White House terrorism czar under the first Bush and Clinton administrations. In it, Emerson incorrectly cites the Aref and Hossain case as evidence that individuals in the United States are "directly linked" to the JeI. With the exception of a single newspaper clip, the only sources cited in the section on the case are government documents from the trial. Coll told me he's a big fan of Emerson. "I've read both his books," he said, adding that he thought Kohlmann's testimony in the case was "brilliant."

The new experts take the stage in trials to deliver what can best be described as the Big Terrorism Picture, comforting in its clarity and simplicity.

In the terrorism-expert community, all roads seem to lead to Emerson. A former investigator for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the late '70s, Emerson subsequently reinvented himself as a national security writer for *U.S. News & World Report*. In the early '90s he began investigating Islamic extremism in the United States, culminating in his documentary *Jihad in America*. The film won accolades, including the prestigious George Polk Award, but Emerson was condemned within the Muslim community as an anti-Muslim polemicist. Shortly thereafter he formed the Investigative Project, which today operates as an archive of terrorism information. He has testified before Congress several dozen times, often flanked by security personnel, and he is courted by law enforcement and media as a valuable source of raw data. Visitors to his research compound outside Washington used to be blindfolded to prevent them from knowing where he is located.

Emerson's reputation took a nose dive after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, which he initially said bore a "Middle Eastern trait," and again in 1996 after the crash of TWA Flight 800, when he had "no doubt whatsoever" that the crash was caused by a bomb, which in at least one interview he attributed to the "permanent floating [Islamic] militant international." (Investigators subsequently determined that the crash was the result of mechanical failure.) But though he was marginalized as a commentator, he remained a player in at least one important respect. He had the ear of Richard Clarke, whom he regularly briefed in the late '90s when Clarke served as the nation's top terrorism lawman.

Since 9/11 Emerson's stock has again risen. He is a paid commentator on NBC, makes frequent appearances on Fox and CNN and has a lucrative lecture-circuit career—a single speech runs up to $15,000 plus first-class travel expenses. In recent years, his Investigative Project Inc. has had an annual budget of close to $2 million. (Last year he registered a new nonprofit arm to the Investigative Project.) Emerson maintains close connections in US law enforcement, and though he has never taken the stand in a terrorism trial, his organization has provided information to the government on dozens of cases, most recently last year's trials of Jose Padilla and of the Holy Land Foundation.

While Emerson has remained behind the scenes in these terrorism trials, others, like Hamas expert Matthew Levitt—the 37-year-old senior fellow at WINEP (which counts stalwart neoconservatives like Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz as board members)—have taken center stage. In 2005 Levitt testified in the trial of a Yemeni sheik named Mohammed Ali Hassan al-Moayad, who once boasted of personally delivering $20 million to Osama bin Laden (prosecutors didn't mention that this contact occurred when bin Laden was considered friendly to US interests). The case against Moayad centered on an FBI sting where the sheik, who operated a number of charities in Yemen, agreed to accept $2 million on behalf of Hamas, declared a terrorist organization by the United States in 1995. Moayad's lawyers contended that the money was meant for Hamas's charitable wing. Prosecutors brought Levitt in to argue that Hamas's military operations are inseparable from its charitable works. Moayad was convicted and sentenced to seventy-five years in prison. "Israel has a very strong interest in making sure that money does not go to Hamas, and Levitt's articles all follow the same line, which is that the charitable and the military arms of Hamas are all the same thing," said Jonathan Marks, a defense attorney in the trial.

But Levitt's testimony, which unlike Kohlmann's focuses almost exclusively on Hamas financing, has not held sway with juries in several other cases. In the 2005 terrorism-financing trial of Sami Al-Arian, jurors acquitted him of the most serious charges he faced, and earlier this year jurors acquitted two alleged Hamas operatives, Mohammed Salah and Abdelhaleem al-Ashqar.

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This past summer Levitt testified at the Dallas trial of the Holy Land Foundation, formerly the nation's largest Muslim charity, shut down by the Bush Administration in 2001. Seven former foundation officials were later charged with funneling money to Palestinian charity committees controlled by Hamas. Levitt, who in 2006 wrote a book on Hamas that contains almost no original field research with Hamas operatives and relies heavily on documents gathered by Israeli intelligence sources, was brought in once again to make the connection between Hamas's charitable and military operations.

"I am not at all surprised, nor do I care that in their closing arguments they described me as an Israeli lackey," Levitt told me recently. "It comes with the territory."

That the case ended in a mistrial has not dampened Levitt's views. In a policy monograph published on WINEP's website in November, he writes, "The failure of the Dallas jury to reach a decision on HLF the first time around is no exoneration—it is simply an initial setback in an ongoing case."

The government, which intends to retry the Holy Land Foundation case later this year, seems to agree with Levitt. At a lunchtime briefing on the case held in the Rayburn Building on Capitol Hill in December, three dozen attendees, mostly Congressional staffers and law-enforcement and intelligence personnel, sat like schoolchildren at oversized tables, eating sandwiches and cookies and listening to a panel co-sponsored by the Investigative Project.

"Don't be mistaken about what happens when Sharia law establishes a foothold in this country," said one of the panelists, Jeffrey Breinholt, a former Justice Department official who oversaw the Holy Land Foundation case. "It will be something as subtle as a single American prosecutor deciding that it's not worth her time to get to the bottom of an honor killing that's occurred in the Muslim community. Because in order to redress this homicide she's going to have to fight through the code of silence that exists in that community. They don't want any part of American law."

After the briefing members of the Holy Land Foundation prosecution team filed up to the podium to greet Michael Fechter, who covered the Al-Arian case as a reporter for the *Tampa Tribune* before being hired by Emerson. The prosecutors wanted Fechter's advice on how they might do better next time. Fechter obligingly launched into a quick critique.

"You know Kristina [one of the jurors]—she's still haunted by the videos," Fechter told prosecutor Barry Jonas, referring to a series of videos that depicted Palestinian children chanting anti-Israeli slogans and calling for jihad.

"OK, that's good to know," Jonas said.

The two men chatted about possible jury room malfeasance during the trial, the subject of a story Fechter had just published. Jonas passed along a tip about another juror in the case and urged Fechter to investigate. "We could look into it ourselves, but you can probably do it faster," Jonas said. "Bureaucracy, you know." ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

the cart and which is the horse, something Ticktin has some trouble doing.

Ticktin seems to believe that Israel's occupation is entirely defensive and that Palestinian violence and terrorism—of course, unlike Jewish violence and terrorism at the time the Yishuv was fighting for its independence and statehood—have nothing to do with the occupation. Presumably, violence and terrorism are in the Palestinians' genes. As Ticktin notes, these people fire into the air even when they are not fighting Israelis.

Contrast this sensibility with that of a former Israeli general, a former head of the IDF's military intelligence and coordinator of Israeli government operations in the occupied territories from 1967 to 1974. In his book *Thirty Years of Israeli Policy in the Territories*, Maj. Gen. (ret.) Shlomo Gazit observes that when Israel came into the territories in 1967, it "could not withstand the temptation of believing that [the occupation] could go on forever.... That was the basis of the massive settlement drive in the Territories, and that is how Israel started its creeping annexation."

"In the middle of the 1960s the world already looked ahead to the end of the colonial era, and here was Israel finding itself marching in the opposite direction and trying to set back the hands of the clock of history.... It is a wonder they missed the simple fact that the neighboring people were cultivating similar national aspirations, and that it would not be possible to repress the Palestinian national liberation movement for long."

Henry Siegman

Playgrounds for Palestine

Philadelphia

Please add Playgrounds for Palestine (playgroundsforpalestine.org) to Katha Pollitt's holiday list of worthy but little-known causes. It was started by Susan Abulhawa, a Palestinian-American, who buys play equipment from a US manufacturer, ships it to Israel, goes through endless paperwork to get Israel's permission to transport it to Gaza and the West Bank, then hires villagers to assemble and maintain the playgrounds. Bringing a little joy to Palestinian kids is so easy for us, so meaningful to them. Susie tells me the people of Rafah in southern Gaza have planted gardens around their playground. They cherish it.

Evalyn Segal

Mortgage Meltdowns, Then & Now

Bronx, N.Y.

I applaud your editorial "Subprime Politics" [Dec. 31] and your recommendation that the Glass-Steagall Act be restored. A call to action could begin by detailing how a mortgage and foreclosure crisis was the catalyst for the Great Depression and the passage of that act. I was astounded when Glass-Steagall was repealed in 1999 and there was no public outcry.

Aramintha Grant

Arlington, Va.

The key is your statement that "debtors have little sway in Washington." But banks and other mortgage lenders do. They spend hundreds of millions ($242 million to be exact) on campaign contributions and lobbying. Common Cause has the goods (commoncause.org).

Pat Thomas

Correction

In Garrett Epps's "The Voter ID Fraud" [Jan. 28] it's Judge Richard Posner of the Seventh (not the Second) Circuit.

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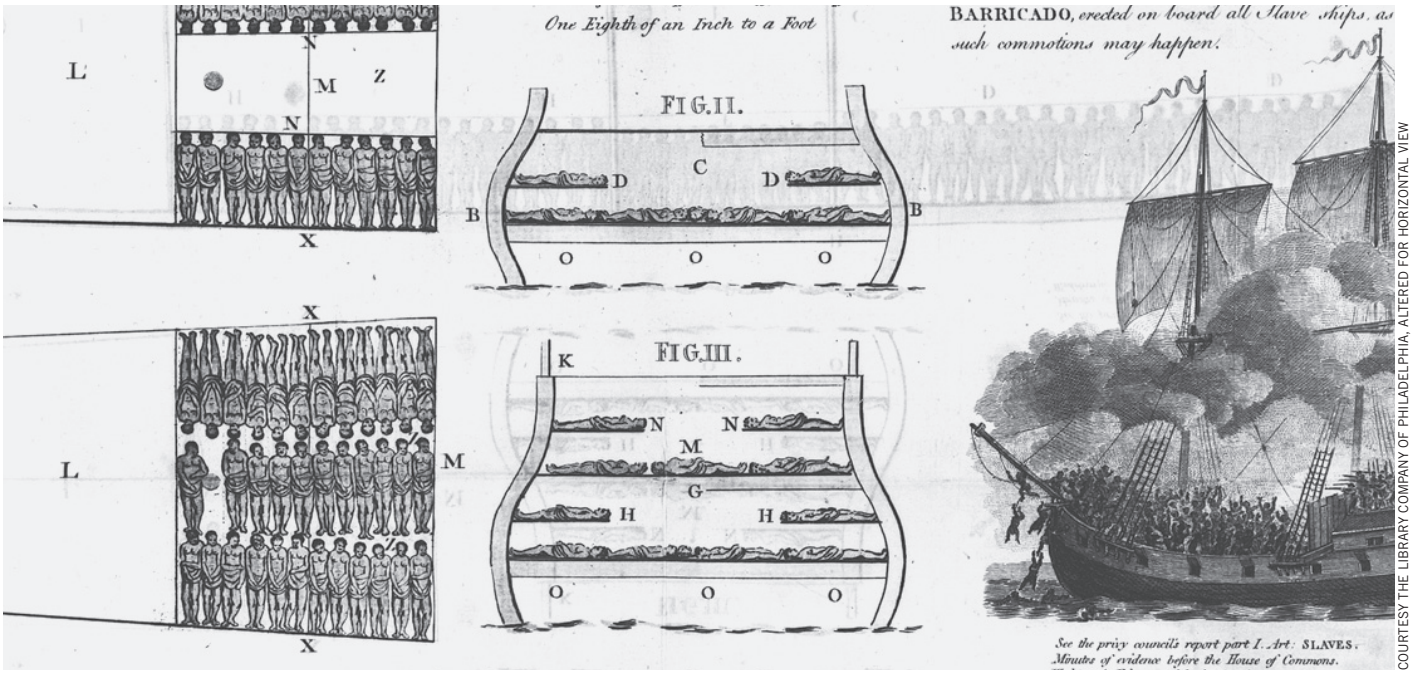
Books & the Arts.


One Eighth of an Inch to a Foot
FIG.II.
FIG.III.
BARRICADO, erected on board all Slave Ships, as such commotions may happen.
See the privy councils report part I. Art: SLAVES. Minutes of evidence before the House of Commons.

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"Plan and Sections of a Slave Ship," from Carl Wadstrom's *Essay on Colonization*, 1974

Little Ships of Horror

by CHRISTOPHER LESLIE BROWN

"Every man condemns the [slave] trade in general," wrote the abolitionist Thomas Cooper, of Manchester, England, in 1787, "but it requires the exhibition of particular instances of the enormity of this Commerce, to induce those to become active in the matter, who wish well to the cause upon the whole." Those accounts of the trade that present "*particular* distress, with its attendant circumstances," are best "calculated to excite compassion." Such were the principles of the British campaign against the slave trade at the end of the eighteenth century, as historian Marcus Rediker explains. And this emphasis on itemizing particular instances describes just as well the approach that guides Rediker's breathtaking new book on the eighteenth-century Atlantic slave trade.

The Slave Ship opens with an extensive and unforgettable inventory of the trade's particular horrors. There are the accused conspirators in a failed slave ship revolt forced by their captors to eat the hearts and livers of the recently executed. A captive starves himself to death after several unsuccessful attempts to rip open his throat with his fingernails. A black sailor accused of fomenting an insurrection gets pinned to the mast by the ship's captain, who leaves him to rot to death without food or water over the course of three weeks. Sharks trail slave ships from one edge of the Atlantic to the other, overgrown by the time they reach Jamaica from feeding on human carcasses tossed overboard en route. Captains embrace the spectacle of grisly executions with devilish glee. The desecration of human bodies becomes at once efficient, whimsical and sadistic. A London merchant orders the captain of his ship to brand each captive with the first initials of his wife's and daughter's names. One master lowers a shrieking woman feet first into the Atlantic; when "she was drawn up" moments later, according to Rediker, "it was found that a shark…had bit her off from the middle." The Atlantic slave trade has been the subject of rigorous historical study for more than four decades, but no previous work comes as close to conveying its terror.

Rediker describes *The Slave Ship* as a "human history." By this he means, in the first place, that there are people in the story—not aggregates, not statistics, not categories, but individuals. His approach stands in sharp contrast to the mode of analysis that has dominated the study of the Atlantic slave trade since the late 1960s, when historians began to seek reliable numbers—the number of captives shipped from Africa, mortality rates in the middle passage, sex ratios on board slave ships, average rates of profit, the relative importance of specific ports of embarkation in Africa and arrival in the Americas. This research, which continues apace, has revolutionized the economic and demographic history of the early modern era. There's no better example of this revolution than the extraordinary database compiled by a team of historians led by David Eltis of Emory University, which, to date, provides documentation for approximately 30,000 voyages from the late fifteenth century to the last half of the nineteenth—a database that Rediker often mines to good effect in this book.

Yet lost in this welter of numbers, too often, are those aspects of the history less amenable to quantification. "Even the best

The Slave Ship
A Human History.
By Marcus Rediker.
Viking. 434 pp. $27.95.

Christopher Leslie Brown teaches history at Columbia University. He is the author of Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism, *which was awarded the 2007 Frederick Douglass Book Prize.*

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histories of the slave trade and slavery," Rediker writes, "have tended to minimize, one might even say sanitize, the violence and terror that lay at the heart of their subjects." Indeed, for historian Philip Curtin, who launched the "numbers game" with his 1969 *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*, the emotions that the subject stirs recommended even more powerfully a commitment to dispassionate analysis. "The evils of the slave trade," he wrote, "can be taken for granted as a point long since proven beyond dispute." But those injunctions now prove increasingly dissatisfying to an emerging generation of scholars interested less in enumeration than in the history of immiseration. In writing about topics such as mortality rates in the Atlantic slave trade, literary critic Ian Baucom recently insisted that we attend not only to the cumulative numbers, to the many thousands gone, but also to the sound of each corpse hitting the water one at a time.

The slave ship, Rediker says, demeaned everyone it touched: captives, captains and crew.

It is this concern with the texture of individual experience, with the minutiae of misery and the ordeal of its endurance, that decides the shape and content of *The Slave Ship*. Rediker offers a view not so much from the bottom up as from the inside out. The personal testimony of captives, sailors and captains carry this account so that we may know the slave ship in the way that those who lived it knew it then. This approach, inevitably, leads Rediker to neglect what historians know now but actors at the time could not fully know—information fundamental to any comprehensive understanding of the slave trade's history. A reader new to the subject will learn only a little about where captives came from and almost nothing about where they went (assuming they had survived the middle passage) once they disembarked. The fundamentals of the Atlantic economy in the eighteenth century receive only passing mention. There is little attempt to sketch change over time. And as Rediker readily acknowledges, there is no effort to assess the ways that British and American slave voyages might have differed from the practices of other nations. But these subjects, to varying degrees, have been addressed by others. By choosing to set these questions aside, Rediker is able to go much further than others have before in describing what the slave ship was like. And few have worked harder to recover the countless stories preserved in published memoirs, remote provincial archives and records assembled by the British Parliament to investigate the slave trade at the height of the abolition movement. Even those who know the subject well will be surprised by the details that Rediker unearths. *The Slave Ship* is rich with anecdotes—so rich, in fact, that the book never feels anecdotal. Instead, what emerges is a fine-grained account of everyday savagery.

This command of the subject shows not only in Rediker's knowledge of the sources but also in his precise depictions of life at sea. Few historians at work today know the age of sail better. The virtues on display here—eloquence, empathy, erudition—are characteristic. His previous books treated the social history of merchant seamen, the golden age of piracy and revolutionary politics in Atlantic port towns. In each of these books, Rediker presented the growth of merchant capitalism in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a pivotal moment in the making of the modern world and in the transformation of the world of work. The deepening networks of Atlantic exchange called into existence a growing merchant marine whose labor made the emerging economy go, although they profited little from the new economy and suffered much from its toils. Those sailors responded by recognizing that they shared a common identity. They forged an oppositional culture in response. In some instances, they turned to piracy. At times they sought out alliances with the dispossessed in the colonies, such as slaves and indentured servants. Before the Industrial Revolution, Rediker has suggested, there emerged a class identity that gave sailors and port town workers a sense of collective purpose. And before the American Revolution, it was Atlantic seamen and their brethren on shore who conceived and practiced precocious ideals of equality and liberty. To know the making of the modern world, Rediker has insisted, we must know the history of the sea.

In *The Slave Ship*, his fifth book, he prepares the way by offering a tour of the slave ship itself. The vessel, he explains, took on varied purposes from one moment to the next. It was at different times a floating warehouse, an open-air market, a workplace, a prison and a factory that transformed captives into commodities. Rediker describes slave ship construction, the distribution of responsibilities assigned to the crew, the variations in ship design and scale, and the administration and allocation of space on board. On these subjects he is a sure-footed and knowledgeable guide. When presenting how captives in Africa reached the Atlantic shore and the waiting slave ships, he relies rather more on the expertise of others. Here too, though, he has read widely and deeply in the relevant scholarly literature. And his mastery of the slave ship's special characteristics allows him to convey fully the shock and fear such vessels would inspire among enslaved men, women and children who had never seen them before.

The Slave Ship is, however, less about slave ships per se than about the people who found themselves on them. The heart of the study lies with an extended assessment of captains, captives and crew. Rediker works his way up the social hierarchy through biographical chapters on Olaudah Equiano, the slave ship sailor James Stanfield and slave ship master (and later evangelical convert and slave trade opponent) John Newton. All three wrote extensively and precisely about what life on a slave ship entailed. Rediker then works back down the ladder of authority to explore, more broadly, the art of brutality at sea, the experience of slave ship work among the free and the contours of captivity. The slave ship, Rediker notices, demeaned everyone it touched.

"Learning cruelty was intrinsic to learning the trade itself," Rediker writes. For the slave ship captain, it was "a requirement of the job and the larger economic system it served." At sea, he held within himself every element of authority and command typically distributed more widely through the institutions of social, political and legal authority on land. Each slave ship stood as a despotic state in miniature. But if the captain was an absolute sovereign in his domain, he was also an employee and partner, a principal agent in a heavily capitalized commercial enterprise, the profits of which turned upon the delivery of captives, not corpses. So the captain had to combine the arts of commercial negotiation and economic calculation with the imperatives of carefully calibrated cruelty. In Rediker's telling, the brutality of the slave trade lay not only in the sometimes casual and sadistic destruction of human life but also in the callous "moral insensibility" that it induced. So, for example, Rediker presents us with the striking image of the pious John Newton rehearsing passages from Scripture while strolling across what he called his "peaceful kingdom" as he prepared to purchase 250 captives on the coast of Sierra Leone. The slave ship produced not only slaves but monsters too.

Rediker dwells on the terror of the middle passage to inform as well as to horrify. To know what became of Africans in the Ameri-

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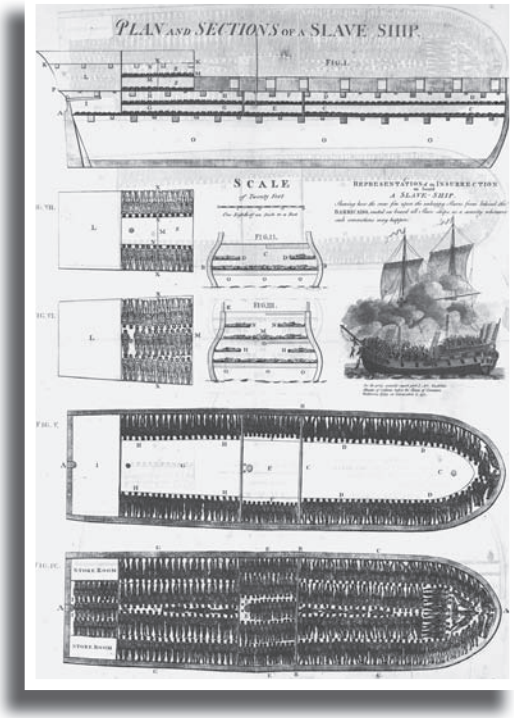
cas, we must first come to terms with what they came through. Rediker calls attention to the choices slaves made in a setting conceived and designed to forbid willed activity completely. The prisoners thwarted their captors as far as the ghastly circumstances permitted. They seized weapons. They threw themselves overboard. They refused to eat. When unable to lash out at the crew, they sometimes turned on one another. Rediker devotes particular attention to the distinctive experience of enslaved women, far more than most who have written about the middle passage to date. Because slave ship captains regarded women and children as less of a threat to revolt, these prisoners often were allowed more freedom of movement on the ship. This freedom of movement, predictably, helps explain the key roles some women played in shipboard insurrections. A great many more, though, only suffered additional indignities and abuse. Captain and crew raped women and girls with impunity. More than a few captains seem to have done so systematically. And Rediker guesses "that some men signed on to slaving voyages in the first place precisely because they wanted unrestricted access to the bodies of African women."



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The account of the captives' experience, however, extends beyond the themes of victimization and resistance. Rediker presents striking evidence detailing how captives coped. On one ship enslaved women sing in unison of their despair and longing for home. On another, an enslaved woman offers a long oration of sorrow to other women and girls, who surround her in a series of concentric circles that mark the listeners' age and status. The slave community, Rediker suggests, first took shape on the slave ship, not on the plantation. Previous scholars have speculated about the kinds of relationships that developed among slaves during the middle passage. But no one has done more than Rediker to document the limits that the circumstances imposed or the possibilities they permitted.

The sailors, the men in between, emerge here at once as tormentors and victims. Often drawn into the work by either poverty or deceit, some seamen in the trade described their fate as worse than slavery. Although Rediker emphatically rejects such claims, he does give extended attention to sailors' own special hell. Because they were laborers rather than a capital investment, slave ship sailors were more disposable than the captives. As a consequence, in part, they perished with even greater frequency. Many met desperate, lonely deaths from disease on the West African coast. Others died en route to the Americas as the unsanitary conditions of the ship wreaked havoc on workers and captives alike. With astonishing frequency, men broken or disabled by service in the trade were abandoned to poverty and despair in the port towns of the Americas. Rediker is probably the first to call attention to the legacy of misery the trade left among those who made it go. It is not a surprise, then, to learn that a loathing of the slave ship seems to have been common among them. Mutiny and desertion occurred with some frequency. The two or three thousand sailors who led an uprising in Liverpool in August 1775 targeted the property of slave merchants in particular.

Yet, as Rediker is careful to note, these protests aimed not to abolish the slave trade but to improve payment and working conditions within it. In *The Slave Ship*, he does not assume that the oppressed found a common interest across racial lines, as he tended to do in some of his earlier work. "Victims of poverty, deception, and violence themselves," slave ship sailors, Rediker writes, "took out their plight on the even more abject and powerless captives under their supervision and control." On the middle passage, in the months and weeks that they served as prison guards, their racial status as "whites" briefly mitigated the disadvantages of class. If sailors did not, on their own, become abolitionists, they were in an unusually good position to testify to slavery's brutalities. In a highly original chapter on the early antislavery movement in Britain, Rediker finds that the testimony of sailors made abolitionist propaganda particularly plausible and compelling. Moral denunciations carried far more weight when coupled with detailed descriptions of particular abuses. "Real enlightenment," Rediker writes, "began not with a Scottish philosopher or a member of Parliament, but rather in the meeting of a sailor and a slave amid the 'instruments of woe' on board the 'vast machine.'" Thomas Clarkson, the lead propagandist for the London abolition committee, understood the strategic value of slave ship sailor accounts particularly well. Sailors knew the character of the trade better than anyone. And their sufferings promised to draw special concern from those statesmen less interested in the morals of the trade than in its impact on the lives of those men upon whom the imperial state would depend in time of war. The oral histories that Clarkson collected on the docks of Liverpool, Bristol and London yielded the evidence that abolitionists presented to Parliament, and provided the basis for countless antislavery pamphlets and poetry. Sailor testimony informed, as well, the text that accompanied the famous depiction of the slave ship Brooks, the visual image that came to represent then and thereafter what a fully loaded slave ship looked like, an image that Rediker demonstrates, incredibly, to have been a "graphic understatement."

Fittingly, this first history of the slave ship concludes with an extended assessment of the making and circulation of this most famous of images. Its design began with a simple description recorded by an officer of the Royal Navy who had been dispatched to Liverpool to measure the dimensions and tonnage of representative slave ships. The Brooks, as Rediker quotes from an eighteenth-century source, was "well known in the trade," embarking 5,163 captives from Africa in ten different voyages over more than two decades. What was not well known, though, was what a fully loaded ship looked like. So, working from the measurements and its declared carrying capacity, an antislavery committee in Plymouth, England, transformed the raw data into an emblem of atrocity; 1,500 copies of the image were circulated in England in 1788. The Brooks became "a central image of the age, hanging in public places during petition drives and in homes and taverns around the Atlantic." It served as a backdrop to debates in Parliament during the first thrust of antislavery organizing, from 1788 to 1792. And it was reprinted and distributed abroad, in

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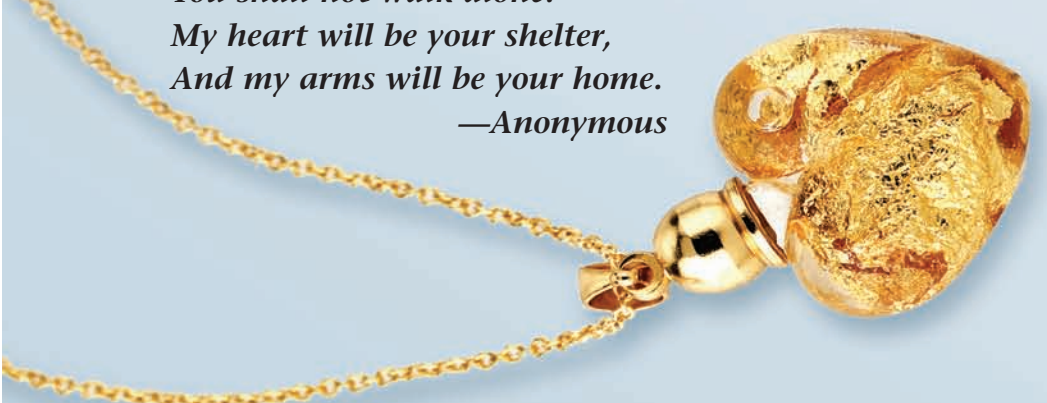

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Philadelphia, New York and Paris, carrying the British antislavery movement beyond the British Isles. For the abolitionists, the Brooks distilled an essential truth about the trade. "It depicted the violence and terror of the ship," Rediker explains, "and at the same time it captured the brutal logic and cold, rational mentality of the merchant's business.... It was itself a concentration of capital, and it was the bearer of capitalist assumptions and practices about the world and the way it ought to be."

These closing thoughts, in some ways, point up one shortcoming of *The Slave Ship*. Rediker largely neglects the merchant capitalists who put the ships in the water. Their ambitions and purposes remain largely offstage. The result is to direct attention to the most immediate consequences of slave ship voyages—the brutality of life on board—rather than the comparably immediate causes that set these voyages in motion. The critique of the eighteenth-century economic order does not quite center, then, on those who might have been its principal targets—the investors in slave ships, the producers of plantation crops and the consumers of slave-produced goods. Rediker, though, in this work, is less interested in developing a critique of the Atlantic economy than in dissecting the anatomy of terror and understanding its most immediate social consequences. He does draw attention throughout to the ways this history resonates into the present day, both in the creation of a racial order in the Atlantic world and with the casual destruction of human life at a distance through the imperatives of global trade. And at the close, he invokes the fleeting but thought-provoking evidence that shows slaves and ex-sailors assisting one another in the work of survival in Atlantic port towns and in the reckoning with death. Rediker closes with an account of enslaved men and women nursing diseased and mangled slave ship sailors back to health or, as was often necessary, arranging a proper burial in a "negro" cemetery.

In these ways, *The Slave Ship* restates and extends imperatives at work in Rediker's earlier books. *The Slave Ship* is at once impassioned and restrained. This is because the "darkness and violence" needs no embellishment. It only requires, as Thomas Clarkson knew and as Rediker demonstrates, a skilled advocate to tell the story. This year and the next mark the bicentennial of slave trade abolition in the British Empire and in the United States, events that, properly, have been marked by commemorations of various kinds on both sides of the Atlantic. This landmark work provides a timely and unforgettable reminder of what was abolished and hints also, indeed, at what was not. ■

COURTESY JACK BRIDGES, WWW.JACKBRIDGES.COM

A view of the Robert Taylor Homes, 2002

On the Books

by TED CONOVER

Readers of *Freakonomics* have met this author before: Sudhir Venkatesh was the source of that book's fascinating explanation of why so many drug dealers live with their moms. A graduate student in sociology at the University of Chicago during America's crack epidemic, Venkatesh spent years around members of the city's Black Kings gang. He even got a copy of the gang's ledgers, which showed that, while a few top leaders of the organization were paid handsomely, the majority of drug sellers—the guys on the street, those most at risk of arrest and injury—earned very little. The compensation scale, in other words, was very much like that of many major American corporations. The dealers lived with their moms because they had to.

Following the success of *Freakonomics*, somebody realized that Venkatesh—now a tenured professor at Columbia University—probably had a pretty interesting story to tell about his gang days too, one that might attract a larger audience than his two books of sociology, *Off the Books* and *American Project*. And so we have the strangely titled *Gang Leader for a Day*.

It gets off to a brilliant start. Venkatesh, a ponytailed math major from suburban San Diego and the son of immigrants from India (his father is a professor too), wanders from cosseted Hyde Park into one of the poor neighborhoods that surround the university on Chicago's South Side. His professor, William Julius Wilson, is mounting a new study of urban poverty, and Venkatesh has volunteered to help administer a questionnaire. He's looking for young black men, and Census data in the university library point him toward a building in the Lake Park housing projects in nearby Oakland.

Gang Leader for a Day
A Rogue Sociologist Takes to the Streets.
By Sudhir Venkatesh.
Penguin Press. 302 pp. $25.95.

Told to get lost by gang members who are selling drugs in the lobby of the first building he enters, he moves on to a second. This lobby is deserted; seeking subjects to interview, Venkatesh climbs up a smelly staircase to the fourth or fifth floor, clipboard in hand. There he finds a group of his intended demographic shooting dice. Suspecting he's been sent by a rival gang of Mexicans, they circle around, one brandishing a knife; as Venkatesh tells it, he goes ahead with his administrative task and asks the first question on the survey: "How does it feel to be black and poor?" The multiple-choice answers are "very bad, somewhat bad, neither bad nor good, somewhat good, very good."

"Fuck you!" says one man. "You got to be fucking kidding me."

The question is, indeed, so ludicrous that the reader not only applauds the gang member but may be forgiven for wondering if the celebrated Professor Wilson really sent his graduate student out on such a risible mission, or even whether—forgive me—this little part of the tale, which took place back in 1989, is apocryphal.

But no matter. The more important thing is that Venkatesh, told not to leave, is eventually confronted by the gang's leader, J.T., with whom he establishes a relationship that lasts for years. J.T., with "a few glittery

Ted Conover, the author of Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing, *is a writer in residence at NYU.*

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gold teeth, a sizable diamond earring, and deep, hollow eyes that fixed on mine without giving away anything," quickly takes charge of the situation:

> He took the questionnaire from my hand, barely glanced at it, then handed it back. Everything he did, every move he made, was deliberate and forceful.
>
> I read him the same question that I had read the others. He didn't laugh, but he smiled. *How does it feel to be black and poor?*
>
> "I'm not *black*," he answered, looking around at the others knowingly.
>
> "Well, then, how does it feel to be *African American* and poor?" I tried to sound apologetic, worried that I had offended him.
>
> "I'm not African-American either. I'm a nigger.... *Niggers* are the ones who live in this building. *African Americans* live in the suburbs. African Americans wear ties to work. Niggers can't find no work.

Certainly intending no disrespect to his academic adviser, Venkatesh writes that the gang leader "was about to become the most formidable person in my life, for a long time to come.... I felt a strange kind of intimacy with J.T., unlike the bond I'd felt even with good friends. It would have been hard to explain then and is just as hard now, but we had somehow connected in an instant, and deeply." J.T., after a getting-to-know-you period, accepts Venkatesh as his Boswell, taking him under his wing, offering him access and protection. Eight months later, when J.T. moves his business out of the Lake Park projects, which are slated for demolition, and heads north to the massive Robert Taylor Homes, Venkatesh follows. (HOPE VI, the federal public housing renewal project, eventually leveled and replaced the Robert Taylor Homes, as well, with lower-density housing.)

In terms of journalism, the gold standard for writing about life in the projects was set by Alex Kotlowitz with *There Are No Children Here* (1991). It also takes place in Chicago, just before Venkatesh's research began. Though he makes no mention of that book, Venkatesh borrows from the techniques of Kotlowitz and other literary journalists, focusing on a set of main characters, setting scenes, using lots of dialogue and—much more than Kotlowitz—putting himself into the story as narrator.

But his story is different. Where Kotlowitz sharply evokes all the fear and ran-

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L.A.

Politically speaking
look at this
a word at a time
on my knee
looking forward to a picnic
with my friends
in the afternoon
in their car
but no the climate is such
that I never
arrived
greedy
stayed on the stairmaster
one more time
enraged the man behind
me as we plow
into the brite grey light
it's evening here
bright as a flea
as I enter the history
of intellectuals
who escaped *that*
to land in
this eternal
sun
burning what's left
of the earth
never meeting
anyone

EILEEN MYLES

domness of the projects, aiming to spark reader empathy with his main characters, Pharoah and Lafeyette Rivers, ages 7 and 10, Venkatesh is more interested in understanding and explaining the big picture. Gangs are violent and too powerful, yes—but why is that? How are the police involved or not involved? What are the economic relationships between people in the projects? Venkatesh has ceded the family-level focus to Kotlowitz; there are very few children here.

But what is here is truly remarkable. As he grows closer to J.T. and then, feeling suffocated, experiments with moving outside J.T.'s sphere of influence, Venkatesh is present for just about all the kinds of things one fears could happen in the projects, and then some. For starters, he witnesses at least two drive-by shootings: after the first, he says, he was the only one left standing (because everyone else was smart enough to hit the ground); and after the second, when J.T.'s main enforcer, Price, is brought down by bullets, Venkatesh pulls him to safety inside the building.

On another occasion, he joins the building's squatters in chasing down a young man who had just brutally assaulted his girlfriend. As the men intercept the assailant in a stairwell, Venkatesh unabashedly describes joining in on the beating that the man receives. Though such a deed would hardly pass muster at today's university institutional review boards—which must authorize the research graduate students do with human subjects—Venkatesh succeeds in making vigilante justice seem reasonable in a world where police and ambulances don't respond. Similarly, he shows how the Black Kings didn't simply "take over" their buildings, like some kind of occupying army. Rather, they stepped into a void of power left by the reluctance of the police department, emergency services and various social agencies, all of which appear to have been too afraid or too scornful to address local needs. Venkatesh, via J.T., shows how violence and disorder are bad for business, explaining why gangs have a strong incentive to maintain the peace in these no man's lands. J.T.'s gang "acted as the de facto administration of Robert Taylor: J.T. may have been a lawbreaker, but he was very much a lawmaker as well."

Venkatesh recounts scenes of a sort that one would be hard-pressed to find in any other book. There's the public forum to discuss gang violence, during which everything gets vented and nothing gets settled—until afterward, when the gang leaders settle their quarrel and shake hands in a small sit-down quietly brokered by a local minister and attended by a cop, Officer Reggie, who grew up nearby. There's the near-lynching of a Middle Eastern store owner, who had sexual relations with the daughter of an angry local woman; J.T.'s lieutenant brokers an agreement involving cartons of free soda that keeps the store from being ransacked. There's J.T. trying to expand his turf by pitching young would-be gangsters in Iowa with the zeal of an Amway salesman.

And there are several riveting encounters with police. Except for Officer Reggie, police in this account are generally absent from the projects. But on a visit to see Reggie at his precinct house, Venkatesh notices a flier for a party at a bar that was sponsored by J.T. and the Black Kings; Venkatesh was there when the affair was raided by a multiethnic group of masked men who stole all their cash and jewelry—cops, according to J.T. at the time. The flier is annotated with names, apparently like a sign-up sheet for those who planned to take part in the raid.

Reggie, asked directly, tells Venkatesh he'd be better off letting the matter drop because already other officers are suspicious of the young researcher. Reggie tries to help him by setting up a meeting at a bar between Venkatesh and a number of the men in blue, but it almost turns into a fight when one vituperative cop keeps repeating, "I know what you're up to." Later Venkatesh realizes, with trepidation, that he has seen this man before: shaking down a dealer in his apartment, leaving with a bag of money from the man's oven. And the officer saw him. Not long after, Venkatesh's car gets broken into and the contents of his knapsack are strewn about in a presumed search for notes and a warning to be careful.

That officer was a rogue cop. But is Venkatesh, as the subtitle has it (and as he, getting into the spirit of things, even refers to himself), a "rogue sociologist"? In some ways, apparently yes: sociologists these days spend a lot of time collecting data (a term Venkatesh even uses to refer to his field notes), which they then parse in ways that a math major would appreciate. The kind of qualitative, ethnographic research Venkatesh was up to seems less common these days, even though, as he notes, it was what made the sociology of the Chicago School famous in the 1920s and '30s.

But in other ways, he seems decidedly not a rogue. The image he more consistently paints of himself is that of a graduate student keenly attentive to his father's ad-

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vice that "the key to success in graduate school would be to develop a good relationship with my advisers," a graduate student who, for example, picks up the game of golf expressly in order to cultivate a relationship with his famous mentor. Venkatesh's initial, reasonable impulse—to write a dissertation about this gang and its leader—is discouraged by Wilson and other professors, who steer him instead to study everyday life in high-rise projects. That would seem to explain why this book, which roughly describes a period from 1989 to 1996, wasn't written until now: academia is the author's first master, and there was other work to do.

Venkatesh admits, however, that he never really informs J.T. of this change in his marching orders. The gang leader, despite drawbacks (Venkatesh's association with J.T. sometimes makes it hard, for example, for him to cultivate relationships with people outside the gang), "was certainly my best access" to the community. And so he uses J.T.—and J.T. uses him, though it takes the guilty-feeling Venkatesh a while to catch on to why. For example, to further Venkatesh's study of the projects' off-the-books economy, J.T. happily agrees to help him set up interviews with pimps, prostitutes, "all the people stealing cars" and more. And he introduces Venkatesh to Ms. Bailey, the book's second great character. Ms. Bailey, a hard-boiled, heavyset older woman, augments her salary as building president (an elected, part-time position) by skimming off a percentage of the proceeds of unofficial business activities to which she turns a blind eye—the illegal hair salon, the illegal hamburger kitchen, the illegal daycare center—making her a gangster of a sort, as well. These men and women—many of them no doubt under duress—agree to talk to Venkatesh, who promises them he'll keep the details confidential.

Unfortunately, and somewhat horrifyingly, he then turns around and shares what he learned with J.T. and Ms. Bailey—to verify the information, he says. Readers can see this train wreck coming a mile away, but the gormless Venkatesh doesn't realize anything's gone wrong until suddenly everybody he's interviewed is giving him the cold shoulder. Many of them, it turns out, were making more than J.T. and Ms. Bailey presumed they were, and now the power brokers are shaking them down for a bigger share of revenues. In journalism, these people are called sources, and I have not read about such a massive, clueless betrayal of a source since Denis Johnson's amazing, conflicted piece about the war in Liberia, published in *Harper's* in 2000 and included in his 2001 nonfiction collection, *Seek*: to sneak into the country without proper credentials, Johnson hired local fixers—who suffered mightily when he offered up their names to the police as soon as he was caught.

The title of Venkatesh's book refers to a stand-alone chapter that is a kind of set piece about a gang leader's life. It starts like this: Venkatesh tells J.T. that he's got it easy. J.T. says, Oh yeah? Why don't you try it for a day? Venkatesh says, OK, I will.

It's my least favorite part of the book because it's gimmicky, a setup for a first-person telling of a day in the life of a crack gang leader. And it's based on a premise we already know to be false: by this point, Venkatesh has spent pages detailing the perils and stresses of J.T.'s life: the risk of prison, the risk of death and injury, the risk of betrayal, the need to use physical intimidation, etc. Sure enough, as Venkatesh makes the rounds with J.T., his patron (sworn to protect him and disinclined to add uncertainty to a tenuous enterprise) doesn't put him front and center but instead tells him to shut up and stay in the background. He's hushed during a negotiation with a convenience store owner who won't let Black Kings into his shop anymore; he's told to sit in the car and look the other way when J.T. punches one of his salesmen in the face as punishment for withholding revenue.

I sense a marketer's hand in the "gang leader for a day" conceit, as I do in the phrase "rogue sociologist" and the author's pose in the photograph on the book's cover: leather jacket, arms folded as though *he's* the tough guy. Yes, we are all in favor of helping sociologists reach a general audience. But this book is exciting enough without trivializing the author's work. Gang leader for a day? How about for years and years? Inside America's largest, doomed housing project? And at the peak of the crack epidemic?

When you think about it, that first scary meeting with J.T. was the start of Venkatesh's career. That was in 1989, and it is described in the book's opening pages. Fast-forward to 1996, which falls near the book's end. The Robert Taylor projects are soon to be torn down, J.T. is facing the prospect of dwindling sales (and unemployment) as his base of operations is demolished and an outdoor party sponsored by the gang is interrupted by a shooting. Life in this world looks as grim as ever. Space break, new paragraph: "In the spring of 1996, I learned that I had received a junior fellowship at Harvard's Society of Fellows," writes the young sociologist. "I was ecstatic; it was a much-sought-after position, a three-year salaried research post. I went to tell J.T. the good news."

By Venkatesh's telling, his main informant doesn't take it too hard—he even offers to set Venkatesh up with a gang leader he knows in New Jersey. But the arrival of Venkatesh's career news in this setting is a bit grotesque:

> For a time I thought that J.T. and I might remain close even as our worlds were growing apart. "Don't worry," I told him, "I'll be coming back all the time." But the deeper I got into my Harvard fellowship, the more time passed between my visits to Chicago, and the more time passed between visits, the more awkward J.T. and I found it to carry on our conversations. He seemed to have grown nostalgic for our early days together, even a bit clingy. I realized that he had come to rely on my presence; he liked the attention and the validation.
>
> I, meanwhile, grew evasive and withdrawn—in large part out of guilt. Within just a few months at Harvard, I began making a name for myself in academia by talking about the inner workings of street gangs.

Bringing up Harvard strikes me as a strategic error: Venkatesh could have just said he was leaving Chicago to do a postdoc. Instead, by sketching out his glorious trajectory, he encourages us to picture him in a paneled dining room, sipping sherry, while his erstwhile soulmate languishes in the ghetto. Within a few years, J.T. is done with gangs and is managing his cousin's dry-cleaning business. Then he's starting up a barber shop, which fails.

This is a peril of first-person nonfiction, which the author of a sociological study might not typically face: suddenly, the reader cares about the narrator's relationships with the main characters. In fact, he will approach you after readings or send letters via your publisher or e-mails via your website to ask, Where is that person today? Are you still in touch? In his mind the story goes on—even if, in reality, it's over.

Alex Kotlowitz, coming from a place of privilege, sagely and admirably ended *There Are No Children Here* by telling how he helped the Rivers brothers find a better school outside their neighborhood, and established a fund to help ensure their continued education and success.

J.T. was not so helpless, and Venkatesh

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makes it clear that J.T. used him just as he used J.T. (It takes a lecture from angry C-Note, a squatter whose income has just been divulged to J.T., for Venkatesh to admit that he was hustling in the projects just like everyone else, even if what he was after was information.) To his considerable credit, Venkatesh acknowledges feeling bad and seems candid throughout about his various missteps. Still, the divergence of the two men's paths through life is a disconcerting note on which to end. Venkatesh (whose online CV lists grants received to study social ills that add up to more than $4 million) concludes his book by recharacterizing that "deep connection" and "strange intimacy" with J.T. that we heard about at the beginning:

> It would be hard to call us friends. And sometimes I wonder if we ever were.
>
> But he was obviously a huge part of my life. For all the ways in which I had become a rogue sociologist, breaking conventions and flouting the rules, perhaps the most unconventional thing I ever did was embrace the idea that I could learn so much, absorb so many lessons, and gain so many experiences at the side of a man who was so far removed from my academic world.

It's a kludge of a final paragraph, the tone a bit reminiscent of a college admissions essay. Perhaps the author knows he has reached the less-inspiring part of the tale: the same dynamic that makes this story so exciting (hero enters a dangerous, unknown world, slowly gains acceptance) makes it hard not to end it with a whimper (hero moves on to better things, leaving friends behind). Give Venkatesh credit for doing something brave and difficult. Fault the world for the bitter ironies he exposes in his book, both intentionally and not. ■

COURTESY BETTYE LANE

Bella Abzug on the campaign trail during her run for New York City mayor, 1977

Bella's Way

by NONA WILLIS ARONOWITZ

"Are they serious?" I murmured under my breath when I first laid eyes on the subtitle of Suzanne Braun Levine and Mary Thom's oral history of Bella Abzug: "How One Tough Broad From the Bronx Fought Jim Crow and Joe McCarthy, Pissed Off Jimmy Carter, Battled for the Rights of Women and Workers, Rallied Against War and for the Planet, and Shook Up Politics Along the Way." But the long-winded introduction does make sense. Bella Abzug is the kind of hyphenate who will forever confuse librarians and archivists who attempt to label her, a woman who surpasses even Madonna as the queen of reinvention. She was a lawyer, a Congresswoman, an organizer, a feminist, a civil rights worker and an environmental activist: she had a hand and a voice in practically

Bella Abzug
By Suzanne Braun Levine and Mary Thom. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 320 pp. $25.

Nona Willis Aronowitz, a freelance writer from New York City, has written for the Village Voice, Salon *and the* New York Observer.

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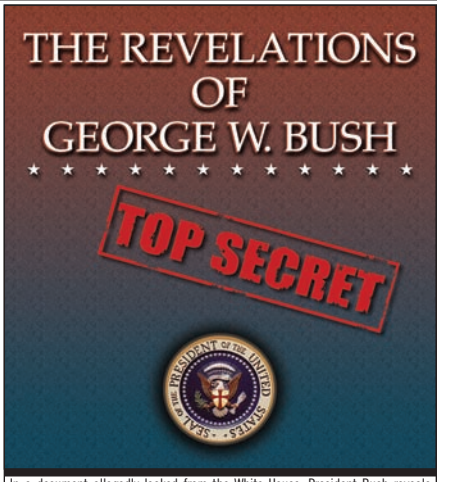

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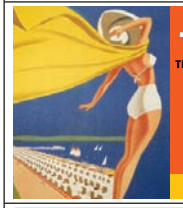

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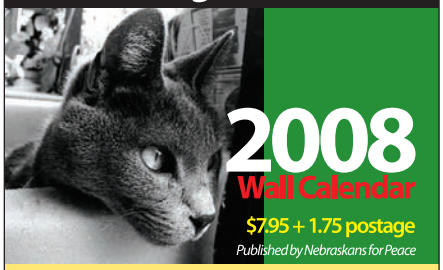

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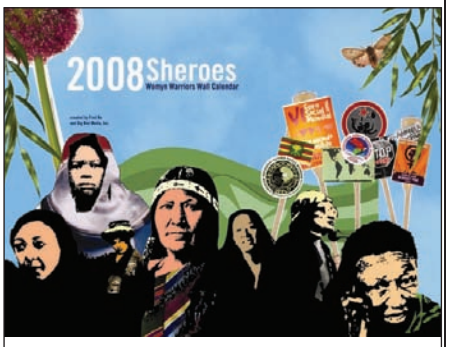

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every major post–World War II political movement. Overflowing with rich and formidable adjectives, *Bella Abzug* tries to make sense of these many stages and sectors of Bella's life.

Levine and Thom, both of whom worked with Bella, settled on an oral history because it seemed the only fitting way to encompass the life of such a controversial, complex figure. Besides, as the authors proclaim, "No one is able to talk about Bella without reciting a 'Bella story.'" The authors summon the voices of everyone from Shirley MacLaine to Shirley Chisholm to help construct Bella's epic. They quote more than 100 organizers, politicians, journalists, friends and family members, drawing on their own interviews, occasional press clippings and hundreds of hours of oral histories recorded at Columbia University. Levine and Thom also let Bella speak for herself, her comments drawn mostly from her incomplete memoir.

The authors tell us their aim is to construct a "conversation" with a motley crew of the four corners of American society, all of whom count Bella as an important force in their lives. Even though the narrative stays quite organized, thanks to thumbnails for each of the speakers and timelines preceding each chapter, it took me a while to extract a particular message from this book; it seemed like I was reading a series of nostalgic toasts. But eventually I began to see *Bella Abzug* as a not-so-subtle call for the return of the magnetic, committed multitasker.

Born in 1920 in the Bronx to poor Russian immigrants, Bella was always juggling five things at once. By the time she was 12, she was already joining Zionist youth groups and making speeches on the New York sidewalks; she was later student body president at Hunter College. She managed to be one of the handful of women to graduate from Columbia Law School in 1945, marrying Martin Abzug in her last year and then raising two daughters with him in a nice suburban house in Mount Vernon, New York. She practiced law for twenty-five years, organizing for civil rights, labor and the peace movement. At 50, with lots of political practice under her belt, she finally ran for Congress and won. She was one of the first members of the House to support the gay liberation movement, seeing its connection with basic human rights. Weeks before her death in April 1998, she delivered a rousing speech to the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

New York Times writer Eileen Shanahan tells us, "The male view…that she just stood up and screamed and antagonized everybody and accomplished nothing is just absolutely false.… Bella did yell at people a lot. But she also was effective, and, within the House leadership, known to be effective." She was effective because she saw all the issues up close. She was in the streets protesting the Vietnam War. She hauled ass to Jackson, Mississippi, to defend the innocence of convicted black rapist Willie McGee. She co-founded the Women's Environment and Development Organization in 1990, inviting women from all over the world to the United Nations to discuss the future of the environment. She grounded her political work in her organizer's spirit. Former Congressman and Oakland mayor Ronald Dellums asserts that it's "one thing to be an activist. But it's another thing to be willing to take that level of activism to governance."

People in politics, especially nowadays, are divided into captivating talking heads and behind-the-scenes masterminds. One appeals to the hearts of the audience while the other toils on strategy in the background. Bella Abzug is one of the few public figures who was both. And she wasn't just a gutsy radical who hoped to permeate the mainstream—she actually got elected. Her charisma was one of her greatest assets. She saw the value in emotional appeal, without losing sight of the issues and the work. Bella schooled Women Strike for Peace on this critical combination, telling them, "It's okay to scream about nuclear testing, but you've got to know what you're talking about…it's okay to show your emotion and come in as a mother…to say this is going to hurt my children, but it's not good enough."

As a young woman who learned about Bella only after her death, and only *really* learned about her after reading this book, I cannot think of one female politician in 2007 stronger than the woman described in these pages. Women politicians have a better chance of being successful the more rigorous their conciliatory nods become, the more they exhibit adherence to the weary status quo. Brash charisma isn't part of it; the ideal female politician—or any politician—is still composed and graceful. Since the "second wave" and particularly in the tiptoeing world of politics, women often set out to prove that they can thrive in male-dominated arenas without ruffling feathers or demanding changes.

Bella didn't buy it. She did not interpret feminism as beating men at their own game. In a way, she *was* just trying to make it in a

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man's world and often succumbed to tactical sexism, even calling Pat Schroeder, right after she was elected to Congress in 1972, to tell her, "I hear you got young kids. I don't think you can do the job!" (Schroeder was the first woman to represent Colorado in Congress.) But Bella saw her womanhood as essential to her politics, believing that women should work at changing existing power structures rather than try to fit into them, that there was a "women's culture and a women's agenda" that could greatly influence politics. She also saw feminism as a lens through which to interpret everything from peace to the environment, aside from advocating for "feminist" issues like universal childcare. When Bella presided over the 1977 National Women's Conference in Houston, she and the 20,000 others who attended buried "the idea that so-called women's issues are a sideshow to the center-ring concerns of American politics," according to columnist David Broder.

Bella came to formal feminism late, but for her, women's issues were never a "sideshow," simply because *she* never was. She was never afraid to be a woman in public, an attitude impeccably personified by her millions of hats. She first donned the hats because in the 1940s a woman couldn't be taken seriously as a lawyer without one; but later they became an emblem of her firm embrace of femininity. Writer Lindsy Van Gelder, during the National Women's Conference, learned from Bella that women could "excel at serious parliamentary procedure, and still…knit and nurse babies during debates, to laugh with Bella as she banged the gavel to adjourn and wished us 'Good night, my loves.'" Bella also didn't see a weakness in her own openness, which, innate or not, is an enduring female quality. "I share my feelings, I share my despair, I share my hopes, I share my tears and my joys," she says of her political style in another oral history. "People want someone who cares." She was ahead of her time where feminism was concerned, precluding the third-wave notion that traditional femininity, sexuality and sentimentality can be an integral part of being a self-aware feminist.

Still, Bella couldn't win: her comfort with her femaleness left her exposed to being criticized for being too abrasive and too girly at the same time. She was told by feminist author and activist Susan Brownmiller, "You wear lipstick…[feminists] will not support you." Even Women Strike for Peace told her, as Gloria Steinem recalls, that "she couldn't represent them because she wasn't motherly enough," despite her two children and surprisingly conventional home life. Her campaign manager Doug Ireland tells a story of trying to photograph her for a *New York* magazine article, saying that "there was an image around her that needed to soften" and that his ultimate goal was to get a picture of her "smiling and cute." Former New York City Mayor Robert Wagner wistfully tells of female politicians who are "just as bright, just as dedi-

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CALIFORNIA

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FLORIDA

Engaging Dialogue

■ Deerfield Beach Century Village Progressive Forum hosts speakers weekly. Saturday mornings, 10 AM, at Activities Room next to Le Club. Join us for information and discussion. January 19: John Trumpbour, Harvard Law School, "Harvard and the Power Elite." January 26: James Tracy, Florida Atlantic University, "American Politics." February 2: Laura Flanders, Air America, "The Media's Distortion of Democracy." February 9: Leonard Weinglass, defense attorney, "The Cuban Five: Legal Lynching." February 16: Lin Chun, London School of Economics, "The Transformation of Chinese Socialism." February 23: Leslie Cagan, director, United for Peace and Justice, "Mobilizing for Peace and Justice." March 1: Brian Foley, Drexel University College of Law, "Nature of US Imperialism." March 8: Lawrence Hamm, Peoples Organization for Progress, Newark, NJ, "Race and Class in Urban Communities." March 15: Joseph Boskin, Boston University history department, "American Life in a Criss-Cross Culture." Directions: enter Century Village west gate by turning east off Powerline between SW 10th Street and Hillsboro Boulevard at West Drive across from Quiet Waters Park. Tell guards you are attending the forum. Two sharp lefts after the guardhouse to T, turn left, park. $3 donation per session. Contact (954) 428-1598.

NEW YORK

Ethics and Character In the US Presidency

■ Is ethical leadership possible in the twenty-first century? The Center for Ethics at Yeshiva University will host a January 30 symposium exploring this question—and many others. Full-day event at the Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16th Street. Participants include *Nation* columnist Eric Alterman as well as Robert Dallek, Ellen Schrecker, Sean Wilentz and Nicholas Lemann. For information and to register, visit www.yu.edu/ethics/reg.asp or call (212) 960-0826.

New York's Rockefeller Drug War

■ "The Human and Fiscal Price We All Pay." Co-sponsored by the New York Society for Ethical Culture, the Women's City Club of New York and the Correctional Association of New York. Thursday, March 6; doors at 6:30 PM, program at 7. The New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 West 64th Street at Central Park West. Free admission. Info: Caitlin Dunklee, Drop the Rock coordinator, (212) 254-5700, ext. 339, or cdunklee@correctionalassociation.org. Panel members: David Soares, Albany County district attorney (experienced and forward-thinking New York State prosecutor who has spoken out against the drug laws); Robert Gangi, executive director of the Correctional Association of New York; a community activist directly affected by the Rockefeller drug laws; and State Assemblyman Jeffrion Aubry, chairman of the Committee on Corrections. Moderator: Gloria Browne-Marshall, author of *Race, Law and American Society: 1607-Present* and assistant professor at John Jay College. Attendees will learn about the impact of the harsh, ineffective and racially biased statutes, as well as current strategies for promoting repeal. This forum will call its attendees to action as it spotlights 2008 as the 35th anniversary of the signing of the drug laws. Organizers from Drop the Rock will speak with attendees about becoming involved in the campaign's efforts.

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cated, but so much more nice and like a woman." Like any public woman, Bella was subjected to constant critiques about her physical image and lifestyle choices; and despite her tough-cookie veneer, she didn't always take it lightly. When her looks and weight were viciously spoofed at the annual dinner of the Inner Circle, a political writers' charity club, she actually cried, saying later that "to make an attack on a woman's figure…is to make an attack on all women."

More than anything, Bella's charisma was embedded in her New York Jewishness. "New York is in her voice," Pete Hamill says, "which has a street hoarseness; it is in the way she walks, with a bold swagger." Harold Holzer describes her as a "frank, strong, funny, earthy, brilliant woman, sort of the '*uber* Jewish mother' in a way." She was, like New York itself, both alluring and repellent. It was her mixture of narcissism and grittiness, her insistence on giving equal weight to charm and audacity, that could have only been hatched in the city. She combined grassroots with glamour and grandeur. Being raised in the flawed swarm of the "land of opportunity" has always created in New York souls a blend of cynicism and arrogance that somehow ripens into ruthless optimism. Her birthplace may also explain her particular kind of feminism—her pride, her defiance of the demand to forgo vanity, girlishness, fashion and makeup in order to participate in women's lib. Bella, with her complete disregard for excuses or failure, more often than not went against convention, warning and instruction.

Not that Levine and Thom cast her as a renegade individualist who listened to and accepted help from no one. They make sure to emphasize the puzzle pieces of people—her husband, Martin Abzug; her speechwriter Mim Kelber; her partner in crime Shirley Chisholm—without whom the force that was Bella Abzug would have crumbled to bits. But *Bella Abzug* does not evade her dismissiveness, her fearsome temper or her downright nastiness. "Once I got so upset when Bella yelled at me that I didn't get my period for two months," Kathy Bonk recalls. When it really came down to it, Bella was a hard person to stomach.

The oral history concludes with the words of Hillary Clinton, who extols Bella's fighting spirit and sees her as an inspiration to pioneering female leaders around the globe: "As I travel around the world…I am always meeting women who introduce themselves by saying, 'I'm the Bella Abzug of Russia' or 'I'm the Bella Abzug of Kazakhstan'…. I know what they really mean is that they'll never give up." I stared at these words for a while, not sure whether the authors gave Hillary the final word ironically or in a genuine pass-the-torch gesture. Regardless, the words made me realize more than ever that a woman like Hillary Clinton, our prime hope for the first female President, is simply too easy to stomach. The only way for women to make political headway is with an even-tempered tactician like Hillary. And even now she is vilified within an inch of her life.

As a woman raised in the era of Clinton and Condoleezza Rice, I doubted while reading *Bella Abzug* that my generation could ever get behind another Bella, or even that a Congresswoman like her could emerge from our current world. It's not just because Bella is a relic of history, a singular, iconic character who could never exist again. Because even if she could, she might still fall victim to the quarter-century effort to streamline all political figures. Grassroots activism and mainstream politics have never been further apart. Is Bella a role model? Or have we inherited an era in which we must restrategize around the fact that our symbolic leaders have been officially disembodied from issues?

Feminist or not, radicalized people my age don't often see the point of running for office because they assume that politicians don't really *do* anything. Electoral politics are secretive, meandering and deliberately confusing; maybe it's best, we reason, to opt for exerting pressure from the outside that nudges the center a little to the left. Perhaps Bella's most revolutionary notion was her idea that open government is the only way to speak truth to power. Throughout her life, as Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy points out, Bella tried to "move a system that doesn't move."

Striving to be a Congresswoman like Bella Abzug may seem anachronistic, but as the definition of "feminist" expands by the minute, she is a more relevant female role model for twentysomething women than most of the famous feminist icons like Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem. "I never felt I couldn't have it all," Bella said. "I do not feel guilty." Bella lived out the superwoman concept of family and career before it was even a goal of the women's movement. She didn't swallow any codified regime of identity politics as a feminist, a Jew, an activist or a mother. She was always herself. Bella Abzug is a reminder to young women, who bear the pressure of higher and higher mental and physical expectations, that it has always been possible to set your own rules. ■

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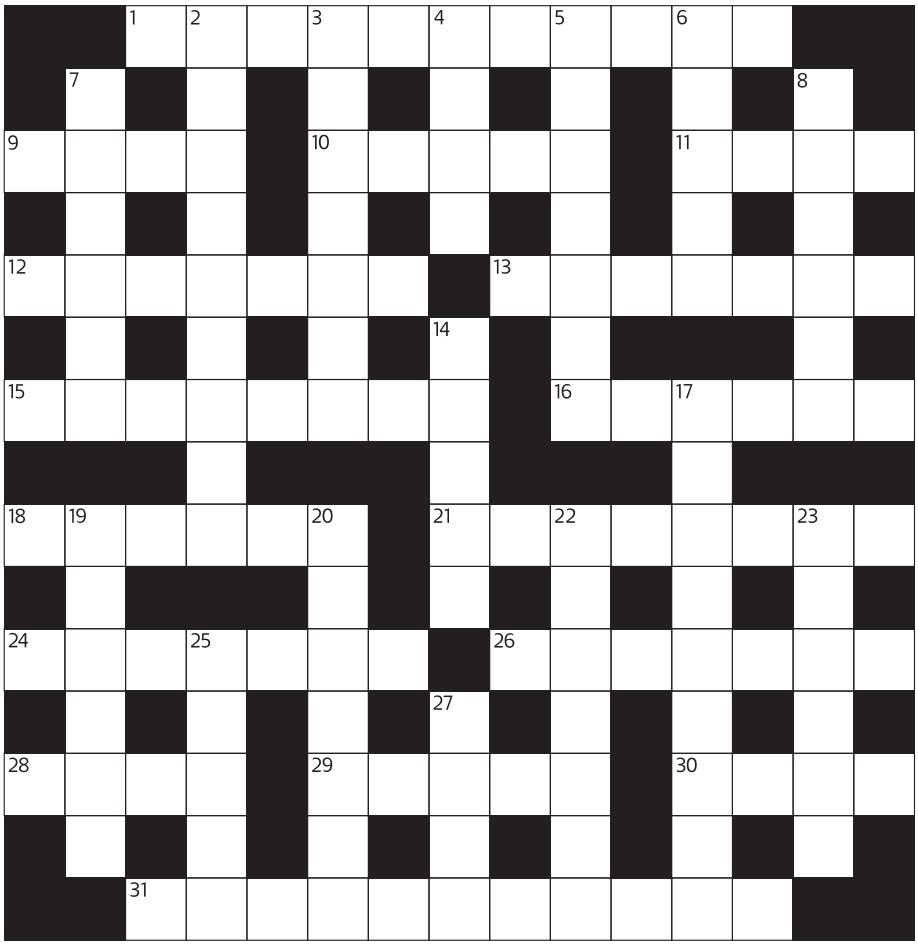

ACROSS

1 "Quite sec" can otherwise describe what is disposed to agree with you. (11)

9 See 6 down

10 See 23 down

11 "In your eye!" might be the answer to its location, but it looks pretty as part of the plot. (4)

12 Bill shouldn't get in it, with a little public transportation getting what you are all, if interested. (7)

13 Give a little under pressure when in the heart of things—you might expect to be given it before the dance. (7)

15 Happy with one having an oil mixture in the garden, possibly. (8)

16 See 14 down

18 Might be responsible for a holdup, but a small portion is around also. (6)

21 Distinguishing characteristics are mixed up by a large number of vessels that had pairs entering them. (8)

24 A close call is supposedly settled by one, so that may be what comes off in a close shave. (7)

26 The last arrangement one might expect to be associated with straightforwardness. (7)

28 and **29** Reef walls crumbled—goodbye, goodbye, goodbye. (9)

30 What the captain takes at sea, with a number in the border. (4)

31 What some do with sheep at night, on the little railway edge—which is far from the city. (11)

DOWN

2 Made a strong statement, and fought for it. (9)

3 With one drug, properly mixed, you can find what you might do with your troubles. (7)

4 The music has rather big birds in it. (4)

5 What travelers might go through are common practices. (7)

6 and **9** across Fixes things conclusively, but what's at your fingertips gets that feathery stuff! (5,4)

7 That's a horse of a different color! (A bad loser right in it!) (6)

8 With 6 down, they could use some polish. (What's the point in such sorry grief?) (6)

14 and **16** across The sign of X in mathematics, and what that little 2 above a number does in New York City. (5,6)

17 Being sort of nude, has a real wild party, but is not at all bothered by it. (9)

19 The school of hard knocks? Bat wood is able! (6)

20 A musical piece was then just floating around—floating around serenely. (3,4)

22 Checks once more, and stays put around the extremes. (7)

23 and **10** across They may get banged in the pit. (11)

25 Possibly notes made by the little office worker. (5)

27 A good-sized number in a rub-up, which might be difficult to recognize. (4)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3112

C	A	R	T	O	O	N	S		R	A	T	I	N	G
R		O		V		E		B		N		D		Y
E	L	A	T	E		V	O	L	U	N	T	E	E	R
D		D		R		A		I		U		A		A
I	N	B	O	A	R	D		T	R	A	N	S	I	T
T		L		L		A		H		L				I
	G	O	B	L	I	N		E	P	S	I	L	O	N
V		C										O		G
A	S	K	A	N	C	E		O	R	G	A	N	S	
U				A		S		L		Y		G		C
L	A	C	O	N	I	C		Y	U	M	M	I	E	R
T		U		K		R		M		N		T		A
I	N	T	H	E	S	O	U	P		A	B	U	Z	Z
N		U		E		W		I		S		D		E
G	A	P	I	N	G		W	A	I	T	R	E	S	S

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